Presencing the Wound:
Mediations of Trauma, Affect, and Memory
in Simon Stone's *Ibsen House*

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Abstract

This thesis introduces and develops a processual methodology of *presencing*, a manner of embodied cognitive thinking and empathic connection that extends from an affective consciousness of singular and collective existence. This is facilitated through an analysis of the theatre production of *Ibsen House* by Simon Stone which constitutes central themes of trauma and memory. Within the context of performance, my research assembles ways of sensing, relating, and understanding to mediate different knowledge forms and develop capacities for empathic thought. My argument is that an affective presencing can further a sense of social-political consciousness, as exemplified through my analysis of *Ibsen House*. The impetus for this research is ecological, in that it proposes a way of thinking about our interconnectedness as entities and our positions within dominant social orders. A core analytical framework is that of affect, as per the work of Lauren Berlant, in that the thesis abides by certain beliefs as to how crisis is encountered and contemplated: first by affect, then by thought, but also simultaneously. This study comprises four outlooks that guide: first, to study the infrastructure of trauma through the environment; second, to understand the spectatorship of the wound through its relational presence; third, to locate the mediation of traumatic affects through instinctual responses; and fourth, to develop an ecological perspective of *Ibsen House* by situating presencing observations along existent research in the field of trauma studies.

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Introduction: Presence Through Affect

> *Public spheres are always affect worlds, worlds to which people are bound, when they are, by affective projections of a constantly negotiated common interestedness. But an intimate public is more specific. In an intimate public one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present, or at least some sense that there would be recognition were the participants in the room together.*
>
> *— Lauren Berlant, Cruel Optimism*

Context and Objectives

This thesis examines the mediation of affect in the presentation, reception, and contemplation of traumatic themes in performance. My research focuses on the interdependence of space, relation, and time within the context of crisis as sensed in the theatre, asking how bodily affects through co-presence may guide us toward a greater socio-political consciousness within these collective environments. Art and cultural forms can be particularly useful resources for the exploration and presentation of a whole gamut of concerns, performing as conduits that creatively mediate in the representation of conditions afflicting particular individuals and groups. Given that issues extending from enclosed settings may face various social, cultural, and political hindrances to disclosure, public presentation spaces such as the theatre, cinema, galleries, as well as online interfaces importantly facilitate critical mediation where awareness and action may not have been forthcoming. The juxtaposition of the private and the public, the struggles of particular groups of people within wider worlds and systems, reminds me of the maxim ‘The personal is political,’ a proclamation of consciousness-raising groups popularised by feminist movements from the late 1960s to raise awareness of domestic oppression in the public sphere. Likewise, where art and cultural forms succeed in empathically conveying the impact of singular action within larger systems, they enable a sense of being conjoined as viewer or participant, where one may see and feel themselves as connected—one of many others.

What my research advances is a framework for the contemplation of singular experiences within the context of a broader socio-political landscape. In this thesis, I introduce and develop a processual methodology of *presencing* which is a manner of embodied cognitive thinking as well as empathic connection that extends from an affective consciousness of singular and collective existence. By introducing an analytical model that foregrounds presence in performance for a study of traumatic themes, my research offers a way of attending to emergent sensation and feelings, as well as a sociality of understanding which may accompany our position as audiences. The theatre production of *Ibsen House* by the Australian director and writer Simon Stone provides the focal point facilitating this study. Performed in Dutch and first presented in 2017 at the Internationaal Theater Amsterdam (ITA), the production revolves around the life trajectories of three generations of the Kerkman family. A key trope that can be observed through the play is how several of the characters seem compelled to maintain a façade of normativity even when their lives are encumbered by much horror and secrecy. The sexual abuse and exploitation of minors in the family form but one part of its unfolding narrative. There is more that is at stake.

In analysing this theatre production, this thesis asks: *How can a performance work such as Ibsen House bring to fore a greater socio-political consciousness?* There are also sub-questions that guide, where a response shall be provided in subsequent chapters with detailed reference to the production of *Ibsen House*:

1. *As a work of theatre, how does the spatiality of Ibsen House provide insight into infrastructures of trauma?*
2. *In what ways can relational dynamics reflect a spectatorship of the wound?*
3. *How are traumatic affects unfolding within a fragmented memory of time?*
4. *What does an ecological perspective of Ibsen House reveal about trauma?*

The plan going forward is to look towards a kind of affective consciousness for tracing interconnected systems, emergent phenomena, as well as acquired instincts toward survival. In approaching a work of performance, it is also to use experiential markers like intuition, perception, and emotions for clarifying an existent ecology of situations and relations at its base, and to build on these immediate, bodily responses to cultivate a higher-level cognition of thoughts and ideas. As I argue, an affective consciousness through presencing is necessary to formulate an embodied sense of the world in which we live.

Guiding Concepts: Ecology and Affect

That the world comprises interrelating systems is hardly an unorthodox idea. But to put thought into practice, to pursue singular action within dominant societal orders makes for the more challenging endeavour. One guiding concept for my research is that of ecology. In 1972, Gregory Bateson wrote *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, demonstrating the inherent connectedness of systems of ideas through a wide range of subjects across anthropology, cybernetics, biology, epistemology and others. It was Bateson who noted: "The means by which one man influences another are a part of the ecology of ideas in their relationship, and part of the larger ecological system within which that relationship exists" (Bateson 2000, 512). Others like Félix Guattari had addressed the degradation of the environment by critiquing the forces of *Integrated World Capitalism* (IWC) in his seminal text *The Three Ecologies* (1989). Guattari takes the environmental crisis head-on and demands for a re-singularisation of the mental and social within a mass-media subjectivity to counter the so-called ecological crisis, developing his particular ecological philosophy ("ecosophy") using the three intersecting categories of the social, mental, and environmental.

The objective of referencing ecological thought follows from a belief that relational systems are always matters of personal and shared responsibility impacting upon our negotiation of crisis across time. I particularly like the directness to which Guattari poses the

question in *Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm* (1992): “How do we change mentalities, how do we reinvent social practices that would give back to humanity—if it ever had it—a sense of responsibility, not only for its own survival, but equally for the future of all life on the planet, for animal and vegetable species, likewise for incorporeal species such as music, the arts, cinema, the relation with time, love and compassion for others, the feeling of fusion at the heart of cosmos?” (Guattari [1992] 1995, 119-120). Likewise, the impetus for this thesis begins from such premise, that there needs to be a wider berth for understanding our interconnectedness—how it is we exist, how it is we think, an understanding that acknowledges but transcends the categorical. And further, for realising a way of achieving these aims. In other words, how do we think ecologically?

Far too often, such discussions stimulate polemical responses, which in my opinion, is not such a desirable outcome if the intention of promoting values and principles of the ecological is really about cultivating a sense of interconnectedness, reliance, and humility. Be it in the role of adherent or opponent where one would find their interests entrenched in a particular issue or stance, gestures pertaining to many a movement may sometimes seem symbolic, a virtue signalling practice. In discussions pertaining to the environment for instance, consequences often come to us as already represented. Outcomes are told to us or we may experience certain phenomena, but often, propositions become a matter of causal evaluation. In other words, a matter of convincing and being convinced. I am not declaiming that this is necessarily all a bad thing, as ideology constitutes the crux of how movements evolve, necessitating action when problems come to head. But I also think that the question of interconnectedness deserves further consideration through other modes of consciousness. I am proposing to look toward an affective consciousness, which depending on the angle of approach, may be considered either a science or theory of feeling—or even both.

We need only turn to one of the earliest reflections on the matter of affects by Baruch

Spinoza, who writing in the seventeenth century, had addressed the Cartesian divide of mind and body that had so dominated Western thinking then, and in one of his propositions in the *Ethics* had stated: "This idea of the mind is united to the mind in the same way as the mind itself is united to the body" (E2P21). There are also others like the socialist writer and cultural critic Raymond Williams who in his conception of 'structures of feeling,' had argued for a certain consciousness borne of the social: "Not feeling against thought but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity" (Williams 1977, 312). Indeed, how might feelings become a useful purveyor of knowledge and belonging, particularly of our interconnectedness as entities?

The science of affect has long been associated with evolutionary theory, and affective experiences are at their core a primal response to the environment for adaptation and survival. I will not dive into a deep discussion on the study of affects at this point but there are two names we should note. One of the foremost researchers on affects and emotions is the psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins who in over thirty years since 1962, had published a four-volume compendium *Affect Imagery Consciousness*. The title itself is telling, as described in the "Prologue" written by Donald L. Nathanson for the 2008 re-publication:

> "Why are there no commas in the title?" we all asked [Tomkins]. "Because there isn't any way to separate the three interlocked concepts. Affect produces attention that brings its trigger into consciousness, and the world we know is a dream, a series of images coloured by our life experience of whatever scenes affect brought to our attention and assembled as scripts." *Affect Imagery Consciousness* is the label for a supraordinate concept. (Nathanson 2008, xi)

Indeed, the thinking of affect along with cognition are core to Tomkins' work, emphasising how our consciousness, in being modified by experience, guides how we locate ourselves within the past, present, and future (Nathanson 2008, xxi-xxii). These studies have laid the foundation for a field now known as 'affect theory' which welcomes other disciplines that hold common interest.

Within the cognitive sciences, there are also others like the neuroscientist and

psychobiologist Jaak Panksepp (1998) who first developed the term ‘affective neuroscience’ in his book of the same name: an umbrella term for a study of affections across the psychological sciences for understanding emotional systems of the mammalian brain and the conscious and unconscious states produced as a result of neurological phenomena. We owe it to Panksepp whose research expands on the ‘affective consciousness’ of both humans and animals. It is from Panksepp that I borrow this same terminology. Indeed, affects or feelings, has always been foundational to survival for both animals and humans as a kind of instinctive and intuitive data set, formulated even before any more complex process of cognition (Panksepp 2017, 141). Tomkins also notes well: “Cognitions coassembled with affects become hot and urgent. Affects coassembled with cognitions become better informed and smarter” (Tomkins 2008, 983). Might it be worth thinking these two trajectories of crisis-response together, to pursue the ecological through an affective consciousness?

As a scholar in the humanities, I must firstly state that it is not within my expertise to further a science of affections or any comparative research of the sort, but what this thesis aims to develop is a consciousness-raising methodology for experiencing and analysing the affective modalities of a responsible and empathic co-existence. This is important to pursue in the spirit of a socio-political environmental study. The thesis therefore follows from such ecological propulsion to examine the theatre production of *Ibsen House* by Simon Stone. What I will be developing is a processual methodology of *presencing* to analyse the play and its dramaturgy in tandem with the experience of a spectating audience. I will elaborate on the concept of *presencing* further on in the thesis, but for now, let me introduce the production.

Case Study: Ibsen House

As its eponymous title suggests, *Ibsen House* was inspired by the works of the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen who is known as one of the founders of modernism within the dramatic arts. As a production, *Ibsen House* weaves together a multitemporal

narrative of intergenerational trauma and abuse. Going back and forth through the years in non-chronological order, what is enacted are relational vignettes and revelations of the Kerkman family through confrontation and dialogue as characters move from childhood to adulthood, from marriage to separation, and from life to its passing, but also backwards, oscillating frequently in time. Due to its literary lineage coupled with its formal appearance on a proscenium stage, *Ibsen House* appears to be quite the modernist drama at first glance. However, against delimitations of genre, I refrain from a sole literary analysis as there is surely more at work here than the text. The production is framed by the central motif of a glass-walled house where themes of trauma find expression through a dramaturgy of events and its formal materiality. When seen in the context of the theatre's spatiality, the *house* also refers to the auditorium where audiences are convened. It is a different kind of *house*, but one which may be thought of as more directly embodied.

Recounting the play, I had found it difficult to pin down who a main protagonist or antagonist would be, given that both the lives and deaths of many of the Kerkmans appear as mere transitions. The family tree is an extensive one (see Appendix A). But if we look beyond the onstage bodies, the character maintaining the most presence is arguably that of the *house*. In the first half of the production, the house is a structure whose life we trace from hopeful days of youth, not yet physically bearing the weight of crisis as witnessed to an empty nest devoid of life (see Appendix B). In the second half of the production, audiences are presented yet with a different outlook of a house (see Appendix C). There in one skeletal structure, multiple representations are introduced. Here, it not only resembles a house of the future in a time after a tragic fire, but also a house of the past in a time of its build. Is this a new structural body altogether or just an attenuated transformation of the former? Audience are led to wonder, and for a time, we cannot be quite so sure.

When contextualised in the period of its emergence in 1964, we are chronologically

rewound to a time before time, where the identity of the house has yet been decided. Or rather, we find ourselves in the process as always, of some kind of social formation. Visually framed to look the same way as a future moment, we may begin to think: Is there a difference between a beginning and its end? Both scenes are foreboding. Both futures look uncertain. But in both circumstances, the house appears to persevere. And at a point, it also passes. In the first half of the play, the house in the heyday of its youth as we observe its deteriorating shell. While difficulties continue to abound in its second future, it briefly holds the promise of being a refuge for other women and children through the efforts of Caroline, one of the Kerkmans and few remaining survivors (along with the house) in the play. In this sense, the house potentially becomes something else at its end—or does it?

The theatre production of *Ibsen House* is a compelling project for thinking about our interconnectedness as people, not least because it avoids any obvious manifestations of a distributed agency or identity, and in this sense, attests to the challenge of thinking ecologically within a context where organisational systems surely abound. *Ibsen House* also possesses a strong narrative core, and in the conventionality of its layout and seating at least, would seem to reify modes of spectatorship situated in an impasse of convention. It is also precisely because *Ibsen House* clearly manifests certain orders that seem guiding, even where so many others exist, that I find the combination of its formal and affective structures so powerfully dynamic.

At first glance, while the stage may not aesthetically resemble the more distributed landscapes of many a contemporary experimental theatre stage (Fuchs 1996), I suggest that the composition of a standalone structure within a non-existent landscape in the *mise en scène* of *Ibsen House* is not so unlike the panoramic compositions of the contemporary theatre stage either. As a matter of fact, all scenes converge to the house. But it might also be said that they too diffuse into other elsewheres. While the architectural environment of *Ibsen House*

contains such a complex undercurrent of interrelationships as well as conceptual and material undertones (see Chapter 1), it needs to be emphasised that the production concerns more than what is perceivable within our sightlines. Or if to put it another way: What falls within our range of sight but demands a different focus, a different attending to? Within the context of the theatre, or even more broadly within contemporary art and performance, there exist presentational and re-presentational forms and media where relational dynamics vary depending on strategies of engagement and conventions of spectatorship that are challenged or abided by artists and directors. Being a social drama at least on the level of content, I find *Ibsen House* particularly worthy for study as it follows from the legacy of Ibsen whose works often reflect social conditions and problematics of some nature, written specifically for their time. Naturally, this brings me to another core question regarding *Ibsen House*: What might we say is the wider ecology that exists? Let us hold this thought, as it is this that undergirds all observations to follow.

Theoretical Framework

It used to be the case, and often still is, that when someone would ask me about a film or performance that I had just watched, I would respond that while I may not be able to fully recount the plot and its characters, I remember fully what I felt. In centring my research on *Ibsen House*, a play that recomposes the past as fragmented non-linear sequences of memory experienced in the present, it demands for a clarity of recall. While I do have my notes to fall back on and a manuscript shared by ITA with Dutch and English translations to guide, it is also true that much of what will follow in this thesis is a reflection on feeling. In my study of *Ibsen House*, I lean heavily towards the cultural theorist Lauren Berlant's (2011) framing of the present as a temporal genre first being experienced affectively. As Berlant argues in her book *Cruel Optimism*, the present is always a "shared historical present," best viewed through the lens of trauma to which she affixes her definition of being "crisis ordinariness"

(Berlant 2011, 10). The present is where affects take shape, thus becoming mediated.

According to Berlant, this view of trauma is opposed to the singularly catastrophic event that discourses on trauma often recognise as (simply) belatedly finding its return as memory (cf. Caruth 1995). This offers us many ways of thinking about the intersections of time and affect, and certainly, of the present and of presence. Particularly, as it relates to *Ibsen House*, the experience of trauma cannot simply be relegated to the moment of occurrence, but how it continues carving its trails through time, morphing and affecting so many in its wake. There is much in Berlant's analysis that takes to affect as a kind of guiding light— "intuition" (Berlant 2011, 52) is how she refers to it—that helps one consider how to go on living. The concept of an "intimate public" (Berlant 2011, 226) is also crucial for Berlant, in how she sees affects borne of collective identity being foremost to a sense of belonging rather than a formal rationalisation of duty. In a sense, it also pays tribute to what evolutionary psychologists such as Panksepp argue in how an affective consciousness of environmental threats is the most primal of feelings which predicates subsequent actions and instincts for continued survival.

Important too, is Berlant's theory of 'cruel optimism' which forms the title of her book. It furthers the notion of contradictory affects such that affects are no longer simply general feelings of pleasure or aversion in a given situation, but simultaneously *both* at the same time: "a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming" (Berlant 2011, 2). We need only consult her opening paragraph to understand its operation:

> A relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project. It might rest on something simpler, too, like a new habit that promises to induce in you an improved way of being. These kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel. They become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially. (Berlant 2011, 1)

Inherent in Berlant's theorem is this sense of an "affective structure" (Berlant 2011, 2) which

she utilises as the backbone for her argument as to why people remain enamoured by certain ideals while staying stuck in a destructive relation where past and present are somehow cohered. It is this relation that defines the impasse that Berlant tends to as a marker of the traumatic, a situational state that is uncompromising and unlikely to change or advance, but necessary to preserve: "how to stay attached to life from within it, and to protect what optimism they have for that" (Berlant 2011, 10). Curiously, Berlant's elaboration of the traumatic seems even innocent. But as is characteristic of the traumatic, this is where affects may also guide: all is not as it appears to be.

When approached as a theoretical field, the topic of affective consciousness comes into something of its own within cultural studies, as earlier introduced regarding 'affect theory' where Berlant's claims are also studied. Being thematically cohered to the subject of trauma, the concept of 'cruel optimism' also finds its way into discussions on trauma, although what Berlant does is to use 'trauma' as a lens for analysing the present where cultural objects and events of significance are situated in their contemporaneity, as opposed to simply holding trauma to be a subject of study in and of itself. As a thematic that is hugely relevant to my research on *Ibsen House*, a production of socio-cultural importance in my opinion, trauma thus contextualised is to be examined contiguously alongside a study of affect across all four chapters of this thesis. In my writing, 'traumatic affects' is also how I will refer to its lived phenomena where relevant. This is most necessary, as I attend not to any singular performance of traumatic action but more so its effects and aftermath—that is, the conditions and attempts at subsistence that follow after.

Some brief comments on the topic of trauma are due before we continue with our study of *Ibsen House*. As a field of socio-cultural research, trauma studies is arguably an inherently ecological practice, emerging from within the field of literary studies in the 1990s and assimilating trauma-related insights and observations from disciplines such as memory

studies, sociology, and even medical fields across the psychological and neurological sciences. Even if formative understandings of trauma as psychological imprint had chiefly arisen from the work of neurologists and psychiatrists who have long been in the business of treating psychical wounds, any contemporary research on trauma must be approached as interdisciplinary practice. Different events may contribute to psychical trauma—from incidences of war, accident, assault, to abuse—but core to the ubiquity and demand for a better understanding of trauma in culture is how these experiences continue to shape people's lives as lived in the everyday. The field of trauma studies has always maintained some degree of social interest, even if stances on memory, recovery, and its legitimacy may be contested and debated such as in the context of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for example, where its definition has yet remained mobile, having first been coined by anti-Vietnam War psychiatrists in the 1970s and now includes other symptoms and event types under its wing.

What I am proposing with my study of *Ibsen House* is to go beyond an analysis of a literary or dramaturgical variety and look towards an affective empathy that will help to situate the singular within the collective. What we need is an approach that guides us toward the ecosophy of Guattari, and thus also of Bateson, that exemplifies a keen sense of interconnectedness: not simply as imagined, but also as experienced in the corporeal.

Methodology: Presencing

For this thesis, my approach may be surmised as a *presencing* methodology that takes into account the potential for understanding trauma through the characteristics of trauma itself. It is not to evaluate traumatic accounts at a distance, to watch the unfolding of incidents as separate from my individual person. Rather, it is to be somehow enveloped in its affects such that what is happening to someone, some family on the stage of *Ibsen House* that is clearly fictional—and hence formally speaking, not mine—also feel palpably close such that it potentially becomes a driver for conscious thought and action. *Presencing* thus, takes on

trauma not just as subject or object, but also as processual concept.

To situate this more integrally, I need to address the field of art criticism and writing which builds on slightly different concerns from the previous elaboration on science and theory. This is necessary given that my agenda as a researcher is not so much intended to signal new frameworks for approaching *affect* and *trauma* but rather, in the spirit of ecological thinking, I hope to provide a modest contribution to the field of cultural criticism by convening with the medium of performance; a medium which relies on not just a physical and temporal co-presence, but the affective sense that we are all here together. There are some key commentators, so to speak, who have provided important scholarship on themes of trauma and wounding in contemporary arts and performance. In this section, I examine a small selection of positions, namely of the art critic and historian Hal Foster and the social art theorist and curator Jill Bennett and explain how my methodology of *presencing* aligns or differs from their approach.

Foster once wrote an essay entitled "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic" (1996) on the abject in art, developing a poststructuralist postmodern critique of contemporary art using a Lacanian perspective of visuality to examine subject and object positions. For Lacan, it was not just the object that is in view of the subject, but also vice-versa. Lacan's theorem was that the gaze preceded the subject, and the Lacanian subject would in turn, see the gaze of the object ("object-gaze") as a threat. What emerges is a mediating "image-screen" that stands between both positions within particular orders, and it is that which protects the subject from object-gaze (see Appendix D for diagram). In the essay, Foster addressed the Lacanian model, suggesting that abject art presents an attack on the "image-screen," therefore constituting *an event of trauma*. This was not to imply that the image-screen is necessarily torn, but that the goal of the avant-garde according to Foster, was to expose this mediating screen: a screen that may be understood as representative of different societal orders, artistic

conventions, and so on. The avant-garde's role, as Foster describes, is "to expose it in crisis, to register its points not only of breakdown but of breakthrough, the new possibilities that such a crisis opens up" (Foster 1996, 115).

While my analysis is not conceived upon the Lacanian model, its perspective of visuality is useful to consider as the questions of subject and object are also critical to my analysis of how trauma is represented and performed—or rather, not outrightly performed—in *Ibsen House*. To describe as Foster does, the audience of *Ibsen House* may also find themselves arrested by the "object-gaze" of the traumatic encounter. But this is where I depart from Foster and Lacan, as the model I am advancing is less of the two-way gaze, but more a porous sphere of affective presencing that overlaps, and thus re-distributes the potential routes of access between entities (see Appendix E for diagram). Indeed, the acknowledgement of selves within a co-present space of performance may confront the "image-screen" as does the work of many a live performance artist, but my analysis of *Ibsen House* also encompasses more than this. Presencing attends to this "image-screen," this stage-to-spectator hierarchy of a dramatic work, but also simultaneously circumvents it. In other words, a greater interconnectedness is pursued, even if the screen—now a sub-element—still remains intact.

Furthermore, the positions of object and subject are not always placeable within a presencing model. Perhaps, object and subject are always moving; perhaps, there are several objects and subjects all at once. As an audience body, we are both one and several. Additionally, symbolic orders will always exist; if torn, new ones always re-emerge. Due to the conventions that apply to a work such as *Ibsen House*, we may observe a division of spectator and stage, and the complicity of an audience which I associate with the spectatorship of the wound in culture (see Chapter 2). These are not issues unto themselves. What matters in my opinion, is that these symbolic orders be recognised. In this sense, I stand

with Foster in how the traumatic event (and its affects) may involve the exposure of these systems, but it is no longer the double cone of vision that positions both object and subject. Instead, I locate a contingent sphere of affect through the atmospheric that connects all within its world. Subject and object, but also no longer just.

Let us next turn to Bennett, who has also published a critical examination of trauma in contemporary art in her book *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (2005) where her proposition is anchored in the affective quality of art being a particular kind of visual language which contributes to the understanding of trauma and loss. Bennett's study is in response to the conflicts of different nations, where there is an arising necessity for an empathic relation that respects and contributes to its politics—a push for contemporary art to be "transactive" rather than "communicative" (Bennett 2005, 7). In many ways, my determination of presencing is similar to Bennett's approach, insofar as we both examine the spectating experience in terms of an affective empathy. However, my approach is also different in that I am thinking of affect as more than characteristic of a visual language. *Ibsen House*, being a work of theatre, comprises a liveness and co-presence of bodies and spaces that becomes ultimately all consuming, pulling audiences into the presences of trauma's unfolding. The empathic presence that I advance connects the audience to an embodied understanding of how trauma exists not just socially, but also temporally. In the chapters that follow, I develop a notion of affective presencing in *Ibsen House* through four interdependent objects of analysis that concern the stage environment, the sociality of the theatre, the instinctual responses to crisis, and the ecological relations of these observations.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter is "Trauma as Infrastructure." This chapter takes as its object the stage environment of *Ibsen House*. Berlant's framing of an "affective structure of an optimistic attachment" (Berlant 2011, 2) provides the impetus for this chapter, where I trace

the complex affectivity of space in relation to the traumatic. The house of *Ibsen House* will be attended to in its conceptual and structural performativity, and thus relies in part on its semiological potential to derive connections between its extensive spatiality and the intensive infrastructures of trauma. What I propose, is to see trauma in its shapeshifting topology between and across dimensions, and how environments in their mediation of worlds may also suggest to us the affectivity of trauma in the evolvement of any shared present.

The second chapter is "Presencing: House-to-House." This chapter takes as its object the sociality of the theatre where *Ibsen House* is performed to think through a spectatorship of the wound. Importantly, it develops the methodological framework of *presencing* in greater detail, positioning the notion of presence within the medium of live performance. With reference to sequences in *Ibsen House*, this chapter will offer three complementary frameworks of *material presencing*, *temporal presencing*, and *cognitive presencing* for analysing the processes of affective connection that arises from within the play. The first framework of *material presencing* will be positioned within shifts in theatre history from text to material (Fischer-Lichte 2008), and follow with an examination of the relationality of the wounded body in performance (Jones 2009). It is here that I develop my approach to affective consciousness as crucially supported in an interpretive process and not its situational immediacy. The second framework of *temporal presencing* focuses on the constitution of traumatic affects within a shared duration. It is time, as I argue, that carries the movement of bodies, utterances, and relations. A range of perspectives will be consulted pertaining to processes of sensation (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994), aura and presence (Benjamin 1969; Power 2008), and the transmission of affect (Brennan 2004). And finally, the framework of *cognitive presencing* will focus on our subjective capacities of sensation, perception, and conception and how they help formulate understandings of trauma, particularly when traumatic acts in *Ibsen House* are occluded from enactment or subsumed in

narratorial gaps. In other words, cognitive presencing is the process by which we make sense of sense. For this, I refer to theories of perception and presence (Noë 2004; 2012) to substantiate my attribution of knowledge production to the cognitive while building on earlier observations pertaining to material and time.

The third chapter "The Shape/s of Affect" takes as its object the mental, instinctual responses to crisis that characters demonstrate in *Ibsen House*. Here, I follow from Berlant's framing of the intuition as a subjective archiving system for managing emergent affects during the presencing of crisis. What this chapter aims to do is examine how traumatic affects are mediated in crisis through the three identified forms of the 'conversation,' the 'deviation' and the 'episode' in *Ibsen House*. I refer closely to a number of incidents reflecting the Kerkmans' response to crisis to locate the impasse of trauma within an activist genre as does Berlant, where the presencing of crisis oscillates between varied processual and mediative states as flows of intensity revealed in action.

The fourth and final chapter "Ibsen House: An Ecological Perspective" is a summary text that combines observations from the field of trauma studies with presencing insights from earlier chapters. Indeed, my claim is that trauma is itself an ecological phenomenon as traumatic affects comprise interconnected shapeshifting forms when mediated through environments, time, and bodies. This chapter concludes with three observations about the character of trauma as it relates to space, identity, and sensory phenomena. Finally, there will be an Afterword with some closing remarks.

Chapter 1

Trauma as Infrastructure

We do not live in Euclidean space. We live between dimensions.
— Brian Massumi, Parables of the Virtual

Introduction: Glass Reflections

Entering the auditorium at ITA, the house is the first thing that greets you. On the stage, a standalone house is warmly lit from the inside. Glass-walled enclosure, nothing to hide. Its interior as clear as day. A woman is moving about in the kitchen of the house. Her back is facing the auditorium. We watch her reaching into a bar fridge under the countertop. We see her organising the dishes. She carries on with a practiced fluency, one day in a time of many. Off the stage in a different type of house, patrons wander about rows of seating, looking for their spots in the fluorescent daylight of the auditorium. Some stand around, engaging in final minutes of conversation before the auditorium lights would begin to dim. Others begin to settle in, having located their seats. Satisfied with their timely arrival, they would gradually turn to the stage, gladly affixing their eyes to the domestic interiors of the set and what presents as already ongoing activity. The air is circling. There is movement all around. And yet, it also seems like not much is happening. But it is this that sets the pace. Time is already unfolding. We wait and we ponder: what is to happen next? Audiences watch the house of the set and the movements that transpire, just as the house watches the audience, set within a different type of space. Two worlds, two stages, two lifetimes? And yet, perhaps nothing really separates them.

When Berlant referred to the "affective structure of an optimistic attachment" (Berlant 2011, 2), what is emphasised is the quality of a relation that hinges on the possibility of a better hereafter, a hopeful tending towards a situation which may perhaps suggest a contrary state of affairs. The trouble with such attachments is that it emerges from sometimes

contradicting intensities that pit what is sensed or known, against what is desired. And yet, the parties involved remain resolutely committed to the futurity of unfolding action: it will be better, I suppose? Optimism is not all bad. In fact, beyond good or bad, it might sometimes be necessary. Belief is what keeps one going. And it can also be cruel. The "cruel" part, as Berlant tells us, is "when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving" (Berlant 2011, 2). A woeful story of commitment to a cause when circumstances not only indicate the opposite but may even be impeding and self-destructive. These traits are seldom clear at the beginning and typically more recognisable in hindsight. In *Ibsen House*, we are given a sense of how characters are affectively cohered to various relations and situations from the onset, just as our attachment to its narrative is also gradually building up.

The question of 'why' is never easy to answer, especially when one is already steeped in the depths of such situations. The affective structure of trauma reads a bit like that. Affect, while autonomic (Massumi 1995), is also personally felt insofar as one finds themselves encumbered by it. The affectivity of trauma is hence to do with its many aftermaths. A recurrence of experience that one keeps needing to overcome or respond adequately to. It is not the best way to live but at least, one still manages to keep going. Something is at stake in the holding pattern. Something already is happening, even if we do not see it—or maybe we do, but do not so much desire to acknowledge it. When this happens—and it often happens quite so gradually—the affective structure begins to take on a heterogeneity of push and pulls, a whirling of emotions, a sensitivity to different influences. It takes form, as Berlant explains, as a sense of attachment to "a situation of profound threat that is, at the same time, profoundly confirming" (Berlant 2011, 2). And still, optimism is what keeps one hanging on. Many things can comprise an optimistic attachment, and it remains optimistic insofar as it is believed that it still represents that potential ideal—but really, it is comprised of so many

other less optimal possibilities.

In this first chapter, my study of the elusive object of trauma begins from the iconography of the house (or home) in the set piece of *Ibsen House*. My sense is that there is something quite complex about the way in which space operates, a presence of an "affective movement of life" agitating beneath the surface (McCormack 2009, 279). This does not just concern the play's narrative, but also the experiential foundations of how crisis is sensed and engaged with in performance. My objective is to think space together with the infrastructure of trauma: its organisation, its operation, its persistence. The house provides the central marker of the family unit in the story of the Kerkmans. This house is their holiday home, which genesis, life, and eventual ruin follow in their vicissitudes, or perhaps more accurately even, any persons whose worlds are shaped around them. And yet, for better or worse, the house is also that which defines the family—their terror but also their hope. I therefore begin with the object of the house, thinking through what comprises structures of attachment as one might sense of trauma, and indeed, what the multitude of forces are that demands one to keep on going.

It follows that the question I hope to answer with this chapter is simply composed as such: *As a work of theatre, how does the spatiality of Ibsen House provide insight into infrastructures of trauma?* My claim is that environments provide the framework for the affective mediation and politicisation of worlds in performance—between past and present, between characters, between audience and stage. I argue that the performative constitution and interdimensional confluences of what makes an environment, what it means to be in space, altogether mediate how trauma is brought to bear in the evolvement of any shared present. The intricate infrastructure of trauma's unfolding is what I endeavour to unravel. The Kerkmans are the family whose tragic story we now find ourselves awaiting as audiences, whose life we find ourselves scrutinising through the glass reflections of their stunning

abode. Occasionally, in the glass walls of this momentous set piece, we may even chance upon our own.

My approach for this chapter will depend less on theories of trauma but take on an *aesthetico-political* stance for the analysis of the traumatic: thinking politics through aesthetics, and vice-versa (Massumi 2011, 12-13). The becoming of experience forms a core aspect of my inquiry. In the essay "Percept, Affect, and Concept" (1991) by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the analogy of a house was employed to methodically describe a comprehensive reversal of parts that contribute to the being of sensation. In Deleuze and Guattari's exposition, the house maintains a capacity to frame and filter the many forces of being that preside in its world. Visible features—window, door, wall—all hold influence that pertains not just to the structural. Just as we may come to sense through the Kerkmans, the enframing of life as lived through the house is a result of these many preconditions where material and immaterial forces are always at bay and also at play. What amounts to the compounding of sensation reveal themselves in a deconstruction of its planarity. Each feature, insofar as it can be distinguished, serves autonomously and collectively to partake in its becoming. Body as house, house as body. Insofar as the space of the house be approached as embodied structure, there is much that can be gleaned from this elemental unfolding of sensation into its parts. This is what I also hope to do. Here, we trace a turn to the structural dynamics of space and the becoming of trauma in all its varied components.

In what follows, I hope to develop a response in four duly titled parts which consolidates my line of reflection on the performative structuring of trauma in *Ibsen House*. The first section 'domestic dissonance' explores the concept of the home and its discontents; the second section 'performative architectures' engages with the structural design of the house to think through potentialities; the third section 'shapeshifting topologies' contemplates space through more than its Euclidean features; and the fourth section 'states of mattering"

considers facets of agency and change. While I have made mention of both *houses* of the stage and audience at the opening paragraph, I will for reasons of conciseness, only reflect on the motif of the house/home in the central set piece for this opening chapter. The relationality of audience and stage will be given a fuller analysis in the second chapter.

Domestic Dissonance

The house—this house that we see—is where all action past and present revolve around. Clearly, the space of the house is central to the play from the get-go. Objectively speaking, it is stunning as a set piece. In the narrative, it is even referred to as a modern architectural marvel, even landing a role in the (fictional) architectural history books. As a living environment, the layout is reasonably spacious. It is also cosy. And the rooms while separate, also seem to flow from one to another. An open plan kitchen, a family table, a generous living compound. As the play goes on, we have much time to contemplate this scene of communal living where all relations seem to revolve around the house's continued existence. From the front view of the property, we even sight a mezzanine where a comfortable bedroom seems to be: one example of the private made public. But this resplendence gradually gives way to a realisation that the house resembles a terrarium of sorts. Ornamental home, ornamental family? Small blows challenge this image. Indeed, the very first exchange we encounter when the theatre lights dim, is a disputation between the woman Lena, and her partner Jacob, who have both just spent the night in the bedroom of the house. More episodes are introduced from here on. Simmering exchanges follow.

What makes a house a home? Typically understood, the house is a building for habitation. A home however, as the Webster Dictionary defines, is "the abiding place of the affections, especially of the domestic affections," or as another definition articulates, "a place of refuge and rest" (WD). The house and the home are tenuously linked, complementary even, but they are not one and the same. The definitive reference to the affective abode of a

home underpins the particularities of space that I consider along with Berlant's theorem. Many of the Kerkmans spend their lives pining for such a home, doing all they can so as to move toward such ends. But "Ibsen House" is what it remains to be, just a house. There seems always to be something troubling, something lacking about life as it is lived in the domestic. What I am interested in pursuing here is not what makes a perfect home, or what stops a place from becoming one, but rather, what of the *house* might be useful to understand if it be tantamount to the many infrastructures presiding in and of trauma? Again, I return to the titular, and this quite necessarily leads us back toward Henrik Ibsen. Ibsen, as most students and lovers of the modernist drama would be familiar, is known for his dramatic writings that examine family dilemmas and the moral codes of contemporary society. Narratives of Ibsen's plays are also often situated in the domestic environment of a house or apartment, reminding us of the many crises that envelop the private lives of families with far reaching societal consequence. While social and cultural practices from more than a century ago would surely have gone through some degree of change, it is worth noting how the motif of the house maintains a consistent affiliation with ideas of domesticity and affective labour that continue to provide a backdrop to all kinds of unfolding turbulence.

The house is a container for all kinds of wounds. As we will come to discover, its build is the undoing of the Kerkmans. And yet, it also preserves the promise of a lasting unity. Indeed, there are many things that stop a house from being a home, or it might be a home in a less ideal sense of the word. In *Ibsen House*, we experience more of the same. Stone, director and writer of *Ibsen House*, remarks on this affiliation in the programme:

> The more I read Ibsen's plays, the more I see that characters recur. Although they have different names, they bear the same features. […] The house harbours the memory of each chapter from this family's history in the way it jumps from one masterpiece by Ibsen to another. His entire work is permeated with a deep insight into families in times of crisis. Into wounds that do not heal. It is about how we struggle to be able to go on. About how we attempt to feel normal again after things have been far from normal for far too long.

What strikes me here in Stone's brief commentary is the reference to memory—that is, the memories contained by the site, structure, and promise of the house. Stone's description of the house as harbouring the memories of the Kerkman family is useful to dwell on for a while. What of these memories, and why some memories more than others? These memories do not just belong to one person or another. Space and place in this sense, extends beyond a formality of site and shapes my approach to the house as a living and breathing artifact that partakes in the worlding of a family and the kind of living that follows forth. The spaces that we live in endure in memory, in the same way that memories endure through the Kerkman house. The segments of memory that we do sight in the episodes to follow seem singularly unique on the one hand, but retroactively, we are made to see the commonality of myriad struggles in the emergence and structures of wounds that continue to recur across time.

Indeed, space is a container for bodies and memories, but it certainly does not promise to be an amalgamator of relations. For an external observer, given that a range of perspectives may collectively be brought to fore, we also get to see how coping practices of different Kerkmans intersect or diverge. The Kerkmans may reside on occasion with each other under this roof, but there seems also to be a great divide that obscures each one from another's struggle. This divide is also what keeps the family from moving on.

Performative Architectures

All spatial bodies are already charged with meaning, memory, and all forms of relatability at hand. The philosopher Alfred North Whitehead asserts that "extension is the most general scheme of real potentiality, providing the background for all other organic relations" (Whitehead 1978, 67). Understood in the context of architecture, potentiality begets a certain performativity that describes the relationships arising from these actualities of space. This next section dwells further on the performativity of the home through the performativity of its architecture.

My first point relating to the architectural space deals with knowledge: material and contextual. Earlier, I had described the glass-walled aesthetics of the house. To some extent, this framed transparent façade recalls the large frontal windows typical of Dutch residences in cities that would be familiar to many in the audiences. Materially and contextually, there is a relatability at hand that inscribes form into locality, and locality into form. It is also worth contemplating what such overcompensated visual thoroughfare does or promises to do. Metaphorically speaking, glass walls stand between members of the Kerkmans. These glass walls are inviting of scrutiny, making all interior moves seemingly observable, perhaps even vulnerable, like open game on the savannah. But glass walls also mark a separation. One may decide not to gaze. Glass-walls or windows, whatever we make of them, can also be seen to offer some degree of protection for individuals from the externalities. It might even be said that the house operates not as a shelter from the storm, but the containment of adversity itself. In addition, aside from an "either/or" evaluation, what a visual thoroughfare also concedes is that of assistance potentially garnered from an external party. But *potential* is all that does remain. It is this multi-fold possibility aligned with the multi-directionality of the present, that renders in part the performativity of the house.

Outwardly defined as it is, how is the house as a stable protective marker also able to absorb this cumulative disarray of possibilities? Earlier, I had described the house as having the capacity to filter and frame the many forces that determine the world as sensed. Indeed, the world as sensed is very distinctly modified in the second fabrication of a house that appears after an interval in the production. In this second house, the mood is dark, the form is skeletal, and the structure seems as though it has been through a fire. There is a sense of foreboding perpetuated by dim ambient lighting. This describes the scene that welcomes the audience after the interval (see Appendix B). This mournful setting also sets the stage for the continuum of life which is already unfolding. Indeed, there are signs that potentially track the

unfolding of trauma in architecture: trauma as architecture, architecture as trauma. Or perhaps, the architecture of trauma? We may be brought to wonder about the events leading up to this moment of the darkened stage, although it may as well have been a question of what was subsequently about to happen. To go back? Or to move forward? What would be better? Much as the scene might have looked like the end of times, this jump in time is not a jump to the future, but rather to one of many (traumatic) beginnings.

I find it helpful to refer to these two stages of the set piece using temporal markers of 'day' and 'night'. I also suggest that these temporal indicators can help us think through the time spaces of trauma. If the glass-walled ornamental house was 'day', then the skeletal structure of the latter half of the play was surely 'night'. But to think in terms of the sequential or indeed the temporal, as one might also wonder of the temporal infrastructure of trauma if there was one: does 'night' come before 'day,' or does 'night' come after light? In one sense, the bare framework of this second fabrication of a house provides aesthetic indicators pointing us toward the perilous foundations on which it was built. For example, the original Kerkman house arose through an unfortunate bartering of resources between the two brothers Cees and Thomas that served Cees in obscuring an incident of sexual assault in the family. The suppression of assault and its unruly bartering, is the one of many tragic plays on which this house was built. But this was not the only 'beginning.'

As we are led to experience, temporal leaps are made between one 'beginning' and another. A fragmented continuum surfaces with time. There comes a second Kerkman house, a replacement of the first with a revived agenda. In some ways, it seems to be established on more positive grounds, being rebuilt after a fire that had burned down the first. The build of this second house was led by Caroline (daughter of Thomas) for the articulated reason of being a refuge for women and children seeking asylum although driving affects could certainly be more complex than what is plainly demonstrable. Caroline's relations with the

Kerkman house is a troubled one, marred by lies and promises by her uncle Cees, herself the victim of abuse, and then of rejection by her own family. Be it for restitution, acknowledgement, or the reclaiming of a past that has long been lost to her, the structure of the house is already entangled with the sullied foundations on which history has been forged.

This inherent dynamism of form dovetails with what the architect Bernard Tschumi calls the *violence of architecture* which references the "intensity of a relationship between individuals and their surrounding spaces" (Tschumi 1996, 122). Tschumi explains that this *violence* is not to do with the stylistics of architectural genres but the collision of orders—for example, that of human bodies and of spatial bodies—that come of different dimensions. Without bodies, the house has no story. As Tschumi explains of his philosophy of architecture:

> Bodies carve all sorts of new and unexpected spaces, through fluid or erratic motions. Architecture, then, is only an organism engaged in constant intercourse with users, whose bodies rush against the carefully established rules of architectural thought. […] Violence is not always present. Just as riots, brawls, insurrections, and revolutions are of limited duration, so is the violence a body commits against space. Yet it is always implicit. Each door implies the movement of someone crossing its frame. Each corridor implies the progressions of movement that blocks it. Each architectural space implies (and desires) the intruding presence that will inhabit it. (Tschumi 1996, 123)

The marks of past action once cast, are always involved in the shaping and becoming of the present. It is in these sites that space and bodies are antagonised, re-defined, and find themselves inexorably connected. Accordingly, we may say that space is more verb than noun in this context (McCormack 2009, 279). When the bodies of the Kerkmans coincide with the spatial body of the house, they begin to cohere in particular ways. Scratch marks, pain marks appear, carving new spaces, new invisible territories where memories reside. Where bodies carve themselves into spaces, spaces too may carve themselves into bodies.

The traumatic affects carved of the body in this ungodly union of forces, are also the affective structure carved in and of the house. Tschumi reminds us that what hurts can also

assuage the senses, recalling Berlant's dual descriptor of an optimistic attachment that can be both threatening and affirming (Tschumi 1996, 125; Berlant 2011, 2). Just as Deleuze and Guattari's analogy of the house which attends to how every plane, every feature, are party to the complex landscape of its becoming, it is just as well for Tschumi that in every visible feature resides futural activity even if the present lays seemingly dormant. The violence that Tschumi describes simply comes of proximity, intervention, and even the sheer possibility of it—by mere fact of existence. Trauma too, exists, inter-dimensionally.

Shapeshifting Topologies

The becoming of experience in any given space pertains to more than its geographical coordinates or physical form. In *Parables of the Virtual*, Massumi posits: "Anything that endures varies. Anything that varies in some way carries the continuities of its variations" (Massumi 2002, 201). As I have been working to illustrate, this in-betweenness of dimensions cuts across time, space and relations. When I proposed the association of spatial environments to infrastructures of trauma at the beginning, I initiated a comparative study between the three-dimensional form and its performativity of something of a more complex creation. Massumi makes a detailed philosophical argument in his book which suggests that the lived experience of a body can only be topologically considered through conceptual approaches such as "continuous variation, intensive movement, transpositionality, event, durational space, recursive-duration, modulation, qualitative effect, biogram, and feedback of higher functions, to name just a few" (Massumi 2002, 205). The aforementioned approaches can be considered simultaneously. Much here can be considered by tracing the relational continuum of trauma through a historical present, in part encasing and in part exceeding the physical limits of the house in which the Kerkmans live.

Some are worth mentioning: *intensive movement* (in the activity dealt by habit, memory, vision as harnessed through the glass-walled voyeurism of the house) and

qualitative effect (in what the house would have us sense in varying degrees of intensity) have been in part suggested through the architecture. But additionally, I am also interested in Massumi's concept of the *biogram* in how the body knows and senses, how it manages to sensorially, proprioceptively, and intuitively map the abstracted landscapes upon which it traverses. The biogram itself is not subsumed within time and space. Its work is of a more obscure means, "an intersensory hinge-dimension" (Massumi 2002, 187-188). It also seems to me, to be a form of relational mapping borne of the body but also separate from it; borne of a present but then again also separate from time as we know of it. To some degree, the biogram seems almost to function on the level of the affective. On its autonomy, on its motion, on its effects, Massumi asserts:

> [Biograms] maintain a peri-personal autonomy from psychological or cognitive containment. They cannot be entirely owned personally, since they emerge from and return to a collective darkness. But they can be tamed, induced to appear and perform feats of memory. They are less like a static image on a projector screen than a live circus act, performed in a ring that lies centre stage and encircles the tent. (Massumi 2002, 189)

Thought this way, the presence of the house surfaces not so much through visual and spatial coordinates, but the virtuality of the larger landscape on which it resides. Given my claim that the house performatively reflects a dimension of trauma and its event, it also follows that the biogram of the house is how we come to experience of trauma's shapeshifting topology. What we see and what we sense are but points upon a continuum. But the manner of the biogram does not stem from chaos, rather, it bears too much, "deformed by experiential overfill" (Massumi 2002, 190). The house knows no beginning or end insofar as its virtual presence—the compounding memories of the past—is always present at hand.

Crisis already has its stake in the virtual. The orientation of traumatic affects in fact, feels a bit like the orientation of a biogram. It subsists through sense memories, holding "all of its potential variations on itself in itself: in its own cumulative open, self-referential event" (Massumi 2002, 194). The fire that Lena and Jacob lights in the burning of the first Kerkman

house cannot quell these traumas borne of secrecy, lies, the brokenness of the family, and the fragility of their relations. The past has been instated in memory, although when it does reappear, it might be quite so different in form. The Kerkmans find themselves having to relive these shifting coordinates as they pave their ways around these traumas, always finding their return. The new build of the house is simply an extensive form that replaces the abiding intensities of the first. What our bodies perceive, intuit, and remember, is history affectively recalled in the present. All sorts of virtual topologies are re-enacted: navigational maps of the mind that help us find our way in the land of the living.

States of Mattering

As I have approached the infrastructures of trauma thus far, my method has been to think through the performativity of spatial environments through not only its physical facade, its place in a moment in time, but also intra-spatially, intra-sensorily, and intra-dimensionally. The feminist theorist Karen Barad has a way of describing this coming together of different orders. The term Barad uses is "intra-action": the mutual constitution of entangled agencies (Barad 2007, 33). As expressed earlier through Tschumi and Massumi, the subsumption of different orders in the Kerkman house demonstrates how space is not only material, but is always in the process of mattering. If a collision of orders (or agencies) is understood as violence according to Tschumi, potential for change—observable or not—is always implicit (Tschumi 1996, 123). Any act of mattering, any sensory becoming, is always in tandem with something that is already happening.

The scene that opens *Ibsen House* is a case in point. Correction: The scene that is already ongoing at the start of Ibsen House is a case in point. As the audience flow into the theatre, it is not immediately apparent what constitutes the right mode of action. But just as for Tschumi who states that "each door implies the movement of someone crossing its frame," the transparent membrane of the Kerkman house already entails an unwitting

voyeurism for all seeing parties—that is, the characters of the play as well as spectating audiences—with potentially far-reaching consequences (Tschumi 1996, 123). For it is within the house that incidents of transgression have allegedly been enacted, although never played out in its entirety for the spectating audience. Within the Kerkman household, characters are complicit to incidents of transgression, intentionally oblivious to events that recur around them. The house is the optimistic object that Berlant speaks of, the cluster of promises that seemingly shows a way forward, the spatial body that evolves not only materially, but also literally impacting upon every person in its wake.

Being a work of theatre, we may also think of event potential through the context of the environmental theatre where the director Richard Schechner had described performance as "a complex social interweave, a network of expectations and obligations" (Schechner 1968, 42). What primarily interested Schechner at that particular moment in theatre history, were the exchanges that took place between performers and members of the audience. But he also acknowledged elements of production and space which he predicted would hold more weight in the near future. Indeed, as we have already noted, these planal qualities and their aesthetic presence have been essential in the sensory becomings of *Ibsen House*. The materiality of the space alone hints at the "expectations and obligations" (Schechner 1968, 42) that abound, conditions that influence the trajectory of crises across myriad worlds.

Further, it is also before the performance that a tussling of orders and expectations has already begun. For even prior to my entry into the theatre as audience, the structure of the house has already been seared in my memory. The house forms the core production visual on the website which audience members would have likely come across. What was to be the story of the house, the titular character of the play? Curiously, only a scant section in the production brief would allude to milestones within the play: "We watch the family from 1964, when the house is being built, until 2016, when it finally goes up in flames" (ITA

2021a). Through the publicity outline, it was also never explicitly expressed what "secrets and trauma" would exactly encompass (ITA 2021a). I do not suppose it ever never needs to, because this is the story we will encounter as audience. It is the tragedy of the family as borne and witnessed by the house. It is for this reason that audiences would walk into the theatre and find themselves—not only visually, but also materially—confronted with the presence of the built form. It is not simply the already-present actor that motivates the scene, but that the audience are already engaged in the house's mattering.

Qualitative concepts of interiority and exteriority are core to *Ibsen House*, not just as internal and external impulses, but also the sensory orientation of space as contested and interlinked by inner and outer worlds across different dimensions. What the house represents—for characters, for audiences, for creators, for you, the reader of this account—warps, curves and manoeuvrers its way in and out of time. Bodies feel their way around simultaneously, wondering where they stand in these many landscapes of trauma, myriad worlds in evolution. If structures would function as a metaphor for trauma, each glass-frame also implies a potentiality of intervention, of obliteration, but also of inaction.

Conclusion: A Folding Back of Experience

When I began, I set out to examine the infrastructure of trauma through the spatiality of *Ibsen House*. Such objective relies on a number of presuppositions, core to this is the connection of physical form to some genre of experience. To the extent by which I have expounded on my observations and interpretations, many statements may perhaps verge on the borders of hypotheses as interpretive gestures tend to be, while some have been developed through more conceptual explorations. The challenge of indirect associations and semiological interplays, particularly as may be sighted in the leading question pitting structures of form with infrastructures of experience, necessitates a diversity of means and the openness of minds. It requires, as I will quote from Massumi's description of the biogram, "a

folding back of experience on itself" (2002, 194). Through our own proprioceptive and intuitive fabulations, we may only then begin to feel our way around what forms might induce in these contemplative moments.

How the present as a temporal genre is managed along with its shapeshifting topologies, first requires an understanding of how the present is produced. While narrative reveals plenty about the state of relations in the Kerkman household, I have argued to also look towards (infra)structures of space as more than functioning via aesthetic frameworks. To this end, concepts of the *violence of architecture* by Tschumi and the *biogram* by Massumi have been key in underscoring criteria like intensive orders and forces, as with the elusive continuance and orientation of traumatic affects. The criteria of domestic dissonance as explored was also a key point of address that set the interpretive angle for what the house may stand for. From there, we proceeded towards the performativity of its architecture—that is to say, we looked at the potential comings and goings that such structures postulate, asking how that might help audiences understand the functioning of space via the relational remit of bodies that intersect with these environments.

In making a point about life's continuum, I had suggested that the spatiality of the house is but one part, one point in the midst of ongoing activity. This activity being life, but also of course, of how trauma in the household has been brought to bear. The performativity of architecture is also, as I have suggested, not unlike the processual infrastructure of trauma. When we spot the downtrodden, the baring of skeletons, it is not so much a point to be overcome, but matter that endures, even if it changes. Where aesthetic indicators of 'day' or 'night'—as I described of the two stages of the house—allude to differentiated moments in time in *Ibsen House*, I also proposed to see these states as but an abstracted articulation in trauma's rolling cycle.

Through this chapter, I dwelled often on the potential of intensive activity in the

extensivity of space, operating from the opinion that there is much that we do not see but may sense through the coming together of different relational dimensions of being—across time, across space, and other intersensory dimensions—as vision, memory, and intuition would allow us. As my objective has been to examine the intersecting subject of trauma and space through the context of the theatre, my method thus far has only focused on experience and potential through aesthetics and architecture, and has not drawn from the field of trauma studies to develop perspectives on the matter. This will come later. But for now, having explored in *Ibsen House*, the iconography and affective structure of the house as it relates to the infrastructure of trauma, the next chapter will examine the relationality of trauma between audience and stage in what I call the presencing of the wound.

Chapter 2

Presencing: House-to-House

Introduction: To be Present

The theatre is a place of encounter. At a given time, people gather. Their bodies converge, a temporary community. The crew is set. The cast are on standby. A scene unravels. For a specified period on a particular day, these bodies belong in the same world. Not that there are different worlds if we conceive of worlds in a physical sense, but the converse is also not untrue, that our own individual purviews are worlds in themselves, one separated from the other. Crucially then, the theatre becomes a liminal space of collective action, where people elect to communally enter into these prescribed limits of time and place. Their interests are of course, not always the same. But shared presence has its influence. Referring to political assemblies, especially those of less publicly rendered ideologies or opinions, Berlant explains that such occasions allow for moments of felt affiliations where it may typically be lacking (Berlant 2011, 226). It is a way of being present that is in itself productive, a self-mediated knowledge gathering activity.

The performance scholar Peggy Phelan famously proclaimed, "Performance's only life is in the present" (Phelan 1993, 146). As a live production, we see in *Ibsen House* the performance of many wounds—individual, familial, and collective. As a dramatic work, how we sense these hurts, these traumas, depend to some degree on space as previously examined, and to some degree on narrative as will be further elaborated on. What I have also yet to address, particularly in the context of a performance of wounds, is the subject of relationality within a liminality of co-existence. Many overlaps exist between concerns of relation and concerns of space, where in the previous chapter, I had argued that suffused within *Ibsen House* is an innate politics that extends from the intersection of bodies, both explicit and implicit, within the Kerkman house. In this chapter, my focus is turned to a different house:

the house of the auditorium where the audience are convened. It asks: *In what ways can relational dynamics in Ibsen House reflect a spectatorship of the wound?*

When thinking through how traumas are expressed in performance, we need to not only examine the observable ongoings of the stage, but also the intensive activity that surfaces with the co-presence of a spectating audience. I propose to attend to what I call a house-to-house *presencing*, a consciousness which refers not only to the affective bond between the audience and the stage, but an expanded sense of what objects and subjects of performance in their presentness may encompass. On the subject of *presence*, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) offers many definitions—amongst which include: the material condition of "being with or in the same place," the temporal "instance of being present," as well as "influence felt or perceived." Presence not only refers to the condition of being at hand in time and in space, but also the empathic connection between different bodies. The introduced neologism of *presencing* as a verb form of *presence* in present participle underscores its operative character. In this chapter, I develop *presencing* as a methodological framework for the study of traumatic wounds evoked in performance.

To develop a concept of *presence* as a form of empathic connection within the live arts, shifts within discourses of theatre and performance will first need to be addressed. In sections to follow, this is proceeded by three contextual frameworks of the material, temporal, and cognitive to examine the presencing of traumatic wounds. The choice of these categories may lead one to wonder why the body is not directly engaged with in this study of presencing. Are bodies not simply the essence of what presence constitutes? Indeed, it is precisely because the construct of bodies and sensation are already so closely entwined, it would be more productive to temporarily emancipate traumatic wounds from their fleshly comportments and contemplate other contiguous infrastructures.

Presence in Performance

Since the performative turn of the 1960s which saw the emergence of the field of performance studies, research in the arts and humanities relating to live performance and its various dimensions in the socio-political spheres have predominantly revolved around interactive, participatory, or immersive works with a performative politics that may either operate as part of the everyday or utilise strategies of engagement with less of a narrative core (Carlson [1996] 2018, chap. 4). Depending on context, theatre after the modern goes by several names: devised theatre, applied theatre, postdramatic theatre, et cetera. Each term captures specific tendencies and objectives while also sharing overlaps, such as situational contingency, greater audience agency, and a multiplicity of narratives. Regardless of genre or format, the theatre-going experience has always been a situation of bodies gathering. But presence is more than a situational state. Rather than distinguish between the different movements in theatre and performance history, I suggest that the *turn to performance* may also be understood as a *turn to presencing* where the reflexive relation between audience and stage functions as a methodology for engagement in and of itself.

According to the theatre scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), a performance event is constituted by actors and spectators who are not only co-present but together shape the performance through their interaction. Fischer-Lichte draws heavily from theatre historians such as Max Herrmann who had prioritised the materiality of the actors' bodies in space, while distancing from the semiotic tendencies that characterised much of German theatre since the eighteenth century (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 34). Fischer-Lichte thereby follows from Herrmann when writing about theatre as an art event characterised by ephemerality and contingency, as differentiated from notions of theatre as autonomic object, observable in the modern theatre and its predecessors in the Western canon. Given that drama had tended to be taught under the auspices of literary departments for much of history—and even still today in

certain academic circles—the emergence of theatre and performance studies as its own specialised field of knowledge according greater focus to the body did not occur till at least the early twentieth century. The turn from text to material may therefore be located within such trajectory of development and must be considered within a historical context where drama was predominantly studied in its textuality. Framed in this context, materiality is firmly associated with notions of presence.

Indeed, there now exists such a wide range of contemporary performance projects that so clearly contest the actor and audience divide with the condensing of worlds and the breaking of walls. For example, we see this in the early work of Austrian director Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* (1966) where theatre audiences were directly addressed and made aware of their own presence as spectators, and contemporary groups like the German collective Rimini Protokoll who in their own form of documentary theatre, would tap on the expertise of non-professional actors for their performances, and/or create situations whereby participants become directly involved in an unfolding experience such as in their one-to-one mobile phone theatre *Call Cutta* (2004) and the interactive performance installation *Urban Nature* (2021). This is just to name a few.

The question that naturally follows at this point is where the production of *Ibsen House* sits within these shifts, not so that we may analyse it according to prescribed standards, but rather, to evaluate the extent to which delimitations like dramatic form (cf. Lehmann 2006) and strategies of engagement (cf. Lavender 2016) apply in their dependence on obvious formal and structural differences rather than the relational aspects that are core to an examination of spectatorship. As a story revolving around a family and their struggles, the modernist traits and dramatised nature of *Ibsen House* may seem dominant. But to consider *Ibsen House* purely through its dialogical narrative would neglect the many ways that being present in a collective spectating body also contributes to its ideological project.

In an interview with Park Avenue Armory, Stone reflected on the collective presences of live theatre when asked about *Yerma*, another production with strong traumatic themes which he had directed following his rewriting of the original play by Federico Garcia Lorca:

> I'm very interested in the magic of theatre. There's this kind of wonderful thing that happens when watching something impossible happen in front of you that just far outstrips anything that you can do in cinema. […] And it's got something to do with *presence* [*emphasis added*] and that's why theatre is the place where you can have your heart broken far more than in any other art form because you were there witnessing it. How do you make an audience all feel like they're reflecting on that issue very personally for themselves? And that isn't to make it larger or reach out to the audience—it's to do the opposite. It's to incite the audience, almost force the audience to lean forward, to be sucked into a figure on a stage, and the stage being enveloped by her issues and her traumas. And not just that, but also knowing that they're doing that with other people, which is of course why it's so important to have a sense of the other audience, the society around us reflecting […] they're all reflecting on it simultaneously and they're all hearing the same story and they can't deny it because they're right in front of you. And you can't pretend you didn't have the experience that you had because I witnessed you having it. And that's why it's important to have the audience on the other side because we have to be socially responsible. We can't sit in the dark and then wipe away the tears and then walk away and pretend that we weren't moved by it or didn't feel guilt or anger or whatever because I saw you reacting. I know what you felt. And that makes me reflect on what I felt. (PAA 2018)

Although the above quotation describes Stone's position on a different production from *Ibsen House*, what is altogether conveyed about presence, narrative, and reflection is compelling. The co-presence of spectators and actors is a foundational criterion for the narratorial arc of *Ibsen House* as well as the relationality of bodies with and within the house of the auditorium. While Fischer-Lichte (2008) advocates an analytical shift from object to event as she attempts to collapse the distinction between actor and spectator, I propose that a methodology of presencing that attends to these divides, as well considers the tripartite framework of material, temporal, and cognitive presencing can be just as transformative, or even more so.

The first framework of *material presencing* emerges from the standpoint of proximity, visibility, and semiology, chiefly examining the relationality of the wound and the wounded

body. The second framework of *temporal presencing* engages with the sociality of aura and affect in a shared present, reflecting on the intensive activity that unfolds within moments of spectatorship. The third framework of *cognitive presencing* furthers a theory of sense perception as it pertains to the relational dynamics within *Ibsen House*, demonstrating how sense data acquired in the presencing of traumatic wounds in *Ibsen House* not only serves to situate ourselves within a wider context, but also uses already existent knowledge to make sense of the world at hand. As I hope to demonstrate, *presencing* is intrinsically a processual methodology relying on an acquired relationality of traumatic wounds, that is sensorily receptive as well as necessarily interpretive. In the following, I provide an elaboration of three presencing methodologies for the analysis of trauma in *Ibsen House*.

Framework 1 – Material Presencing

The first framework of *material presencing* essentially refers to physical proximity with injurious subjects and what this nearness of being achieves. Matter comprises everything of the stage—bodies, space, objects—as well as its material presence—visible and sensory (Pavis 1996, 132). Within the context of a live production, there are certainly differences as to how the wound or woundedness is presented. Guided by the story at hand, the production of *Ibsen House* relies on the aesthetics of the wound as enacted and sensed—that is, how trauma is performed and perceived. I had previously examined the house of the Kerkmans as an infrastructure of trauma, but for this section, I wish to think through what the material presence of spectators and actors may reveal about how wounds are performed.

In a live performance, the enacted wound may be introduced through representational simulations or actual injury, both of which elicits varied responses. To this end I wonder, how does material presencing—which very much includes the subset of visual presencing in the context of *Ibsen House*—produce a relationality of the wound? While an empathic response to scenes of wounding is dependent on many factors, I suggest that it would be useful to first

consider the premise and process of aesthetic representation which refers to the outward simulation and consequent perception of these wounds.

In the article "Performing the Wounded Body: Pain, Affect, and the Radical Relationality of Meaning" (2009), the art historian and critic Amelia Jones describes the wound as a *cultural signifier* and compares examples across art and performance that depict pain through aestheticised representations and situated acts of live wounding. For Jones, (re)presentations of wounding comprise political gestures and may be wielded as such. Jones quotes for instance, performative acts by artists such as those of Gina Pane in *Sentimental Action* (1973/74) where razors were used to carve rosettes into her arms, and Mike Parr in *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002) where his lips were sewn shut to reflect similar actions by asylum seekers (Jones 2009, 46-47). While these acts are presentational in that they perform the creation of real physical wounds, they are also representational of a separate or adjacent reality. These performances of bodily mutilation therefore function as political statements through visceral physical scores that demand a call-to-action.

As Jones states, "the imaging of pain is the primary mode through which its political effects take place" (Jones 2009, 47). While it is not live mutilation that occurs in *Ibsen House*, I suggest that a live unfolding performance nonetheless possesses a similar referential potential to extant issues at hand. As a theatre production that inclines towards the dramatic more so than any other genre, *Ibsen House* is clearly a product of fiction. To this end, I suggest that while formally different from paintings or photographs, the material presencing of wounds in *Ibsen House* is not so unlike the relationality of representational art forms. Seen one way, these referential forms are mediative compositions. But while physical traumas are not contemporaneously actualised, I argue that their effects can still be significant. Jones opines that aestheticised forms offer a "politically advantageous mode of engaging distant suffering" (Jones 2009, 48). This is also my claim pertaining to the performance of traumatic

wounds in *Ibsen House*. Traumatic wounds in *Ibsen House* comprise shapeshifting topologies indeterminate in form, innumerably sensed, weaving through different spaces and bodies. They are seldom, or perhaps more accurately put, never presented true to form.

But what comes of these mediated compositions? I agree with Jones that the representational wound is often more keenly and critically encountered in performance. The events of *Ibsen House* are several layers removed from any explicit suggestion of wounding even while its performance is clearly produced and experienced as live theatre. Let us consider one instance. A core situational trauma in *Ibsen House* would be the sexual exploitation of minors in the family. Of course, it would be unthinkable to have this approached as a physical transgression on a live stage. It would not only be a moral, physical, and ethical offence, but surely also criminal. The shock and repulsion of the actual act would make for a synaesthetic experience that is so extreme and likely to circumvent identification or empathy by our own spectating bodies (Jones 2009). In my view, the liveness of actual violence is not necessary for an empathic reaction. I agree with Jones that it is in the aestheticisation of suffering that we find a "necessary mediation" (Jones 2009, 49) for any empathy to take place between the spectator and performer. Jones further explains: "The wound is a mode of signification, it renders the body as always already representational, complicating our attempt to make a firm division between the 'real' and the 'image'. At the same time, the wound affects us if and only if we interpret and experience it as 'real', that is, on some level as a violation of bodily coherence that we feel could happen to us." (Jones 2009, 50). Indeed, for this to happen, I believe that there needs to be a degree of interpretive distance, breathing space, for any possibility of contemplation and reflection to occur.

Wounds in performance, be they real or represented, often operate semiologically. Real or represented: this is the difference that often separates the live genres of performance art and theatre. But it bears stating that my approach to presencing in *Ibsen House* clearly

does not align with such dualistic accounts of performative shifts. Recalling what Berlant describes as "collective mediation" (Berlant 2011, 226), I propose that at its core, presencing prioritises an interpretive process and not its evental immediacy. In addition, because signification is always part of the equation, presencing therefore demands that we also consider the possibility of a wider socio-political context outside of *Ibsen House*. This will be further elaborated in the third framework of *cognitive presencing*.

Framework 2 – Temporal Presencing

The second framework is the condition of *temporal presencing*. Such a criterion may lead one to ask: is the past outside the remit of temporal presencing? My response to this, is that insofar as the past is recollected as memory, it is also that which Berlant describes to be "a shared historical present" (Berlant 2011, 4). Therefore, to the extent that traumatic pasts may be re-encountered in its liveness—whether as a post-traumatic symptom or reproduced in its mediated form as affect—it also partakes in the currency of the present. Furthermore, as I have argued to see trauma in its shapeshifting topology, it also begs the question of what functions as expressive or transmissive systems for the performance of the wound in *Ibsen House*. In this brief section, I focus on the criterion of time. As I hope to demonstrate, it is time that carries the gathering and movement of bodies, the utterance of words, and the unique relationality borne of traumatic wounds within unfolding moments.

As Stone had expressed in the previously quoted interview about *Yerma*, it is the condition of being present that draws one into the traumas of an onstage character. But this is not the only point expressed. Stone also describes that it is in a live theatre setting that one finds themselves becoming intensely aware, not just of their own response, but also of other audiences within the same space (Stone 2018). Indeed, what Stone is referring to is not only the physical congregation of bodies, but what the collective presencing of other bodies within a shared duration contributes to the relationality of traumatic scenes. My point about temporal

presencing is not so much that it comprises the moments within the start and end point of a durational bracket, but that it is only in the gathering of bodies, of action, of revelation within shared moments, that a relationality of the wound may begin to emerge or dissipate. As expressed by Deleuze and Guattari: “The relationship of sensation with the material must therefore be assessed within the limits of the duration, whatever this may be” (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994, 193). Accordingly, I argue that the condition of a real-time connectivity is essential to the creation of such intimate publics, where traumatic affects may find their constitution.

I do also wonder how such instantiation of relationality through the gathering of bodies can also contribute to a performative understanding of the wound. To some degree, temporal presencing calls to mind the work of aura, or what the theatre scholar Cormac Power (2008) refers to as *auratic presence*. Time and aura are of course not the same. But insofar as aura is encountered within a liminal time-space, auratic presence is also firmly situated within a presentness of time. Notably, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin juxtaposes the medium of film with the event of theatre, expressing that ‘aura’ in theatre continues to exist as it extends from a presentness intrinsically linked to a theatre actor’s being as opposed to the absent film actor (Benjamin 1969, 10). Countering the concept of aura in the live theatre as simply extending from the actors—or the (absent) director—Power suggests that auratic presence is that which emerges “*in the act* of performance” (Power 2008, 49). Time is not the only factor, but the “act” of performance is essentially a temporal genre, just as is presence. What Power is alluding to, also affirms my sense of how the criterion of aura could in part also be considered through its temporality, as the event of theatre essentially thrives on the conduit of time, and not just any sense of time, but that of real-time.

I propose that temporal presencing within the context of live theatre should not be

simply restricted to the stage and its actors but should necessarily include the aura of other present bodies, such as of other spectators. I do not only mean this purely in the context of setups that demand for ostensible spectator participation (cf. Lavender 2016). There is already something quite powerful, political even, in being part of the same shared present where the same unknowns, distresses, and discoveries, find themselves in a process of emergence. There is a scene in *Ibsen House* where Fleur, the teenage granddaughter of Cees, would approach her aunt Caroline with an abrupt query having no preceding circumstantial clues implicating Fleur in any kind of family trouble. For a brief few seconds, we find Fleur presenting Caroline with a question:

> FLEUR. *Is het jou ook overkomen?* (Did it happen to you too?)
>
> CAROLINE. *Wat?* (What?)
>
> FLEUR. *Heeft opa Cees… ook met jou?* (Did Grandpa… with you too?)
>
> CAROLINE. *O Jezus. Arm kind. Het spijt me.* (Oh Jesus. You poor thing.)

I recall this conversation viscerally as an audience. A wave of anguish had washed over me, being startled by this unexpected revelation of abuse. The moment was so brief, so sudden, and words so sparing, that what is inferred from the conversation could have quite so easily been overlooked. I also recall that after collecting myself, I had instinctively glanced across immediate rows of seating around me and wondering: Did you hear what I hear? Am I the only one feeling the way I am feeling? The reaction I caught myself having, in looking around seeking some implicit form of communal validation while being personally overwhelmed by emotion, had also surprised myself.

There is something to be said about the spectatorship of the wound as I have come to realise. It is not uni-directional, nor duo-directional, but really, an encounter more profound in its affective transmissibility. In *The Transmission of Affect* (2004), the feminist philosopher

and psychoanalytic theorist Teresa Brennan describes affects as "preeminently social," claiming that when people come together, "psychotic affects are either intensified or offset (bound and restrained)" (Brennan 2004, 65). Just as Fleur and Caroline would find commonality through the act of conversation, co-present spectators too, are given to experience the distresses of these pasts which may perhaps even call upon other associated memories. It is in the gathering of people that a sense of awareness and affinity may be fostered. While the framework of time avails membership in this intimate public that Berlant inscribes, these experiences are at their core still singularly felt and conjures up varying responses. It signals at the potential of empathic presencing whereby one might potentially sense enacted traumas from the standpoint of a heterogenous social body. I suggest then, that any presencing of wounds must be considered along with its socio-temporal contingency.

Framework 3 – Cognitive Presencing

With this third framework of *cognitive presencing*, I am thinking of our subjective capacities of sensation, perception, and conception, but also the gathering of knowledge, not as autonomous detail, but within a network of complementary sense data. Cognitive presencing could simply be described as making sense of sense. As I argued in the earlier section on temporal presencing, it is through our spectatorship of the events of the stage, the physiological response by our bodies, as well as an awareness of other audiences, that an interpretive realisation of the sociality of traumas may be garnered. In the section on *material presencing*, I had also claimed that because signification is always part of the process of presencing, a wider social-political context could afford consideration. For example, our complicity in a shared present of a theatre space may suggest to a reflexive audience how often it is that we find ourselves as bystanders of cautionary warnings or offences in our social circles—families, friends, or other affiliate communities. The Kerkmans may sense of each other's wounds, but as Brennan explains, affects are not just intensified in a gathering of

bodies, but may also find resistance (Brennan 2004, 65). The complicity of silence is not just that which belies the audience of the theatre, but also characterises generations of the Kerkman family. Indeed, it might be said that trauma continues to prevail in the Kerkman family precisely because characters often are themselves spectators of each other's distress. Cognitive presencing as a neural blending of concepts and affective empathy (Blair 2009) does not just pertain to the narrative of *Ibsen House*, but also the sense of practices and systems inherent to society.

The process of presencing comes gradually. As I have argued, traumas exist topologically—as incident, as affect, as utterance, as empathy, etc. Its mutability and transmissibility should also have us realise how wounds are never discrete: In the same intimate public, your trauma is also mine. This relationality helps us to reflect on the conditional presencing of wounds in *Ibsen House*. While I have suggested that sense data can help us understand larger contexts of adherence, the converse is also true. Pre-existent knowledge helps us make sense of the world at hand. The philosopher Alva Noë expresses in his enactive theory of perceptual activity that how we understand the world is through the attainment of skills necessary for processing its encounter (Noë 2004, 2). Cognitive presencing is part of this process. Immediate frames of sensorial data describe but one aspect of perception, although the adjective of 'immediate' might be a misnomer as immediacy can also encompass that which is simultaneously wrought, such as when one sense follows from another when a world generatively comes into focus. Indeed, in Noë's book *Varieties of Presence* (2012), Noë reiterates the same point by emphasising the criteria of 'understanding' in theorising presence:

> The world shows up for us in experience only insofar as we know how to make contact with it, or, to use a different metaphor, only insofar as we are able to bring it into focus. One reason why art is so important to us is that it recapitulates this fundamental fact about our relation to the world around us: the world is blank and flat until we understand it. (Noë 2012, 2)

The availability and enactment of knowledge is a mediative precursor to the notion of presencing. Noë's is a philosophy of perception, but a useful philosophy all the same which I suggest will assist us in thinking through questions of sense-making around trauma and the compounding forms of situated knowledge that together exemplify communal presence.

Cognitive presencing offers us a way to think through the performance of trauma in *Ibsen House* particular when transgressive acts are visibly occluded. In *Ibsen House,* the most shocking acts of transgression are only ever suggested through narratorial gaps. In *Ibsen House,* revelations often occur rhetorically and fractally. In one example, Thomas, the older brother of Cees, cryptically references a past situation when conversing with their elderly mother Frédérique:

> FRÉDÉRIQUE. *Ik word niet doof.* (I'm not going deaf.)
>
> THOMAS. *Ik bedoel hij was vier.* (I mean he was four years old.)
>
> FRÉDÉRIQUE. Het spijt me, ik volg je niet meer. (I'm sorry you've lost me.)

There is little context that prefaces this statement. The referenced moment was also never ever enacted onstage but only suggested through an attenuated comment expressed soon after as an insinuation:

> THOMAS. *En vader, nou… we weten allemaal wat hij je heft aangedaan maar Cees was vier…* (And father, well… we all know what father did to you but Cees was four…)

Just as with the earlier incident introduced between Fleur and Caroline, no circumstantial details had been explicitly articulated nor observed in the performance. Even if the claims are but suggested, the spoken word is significant as a rhetorical assertion of an event. And yet, the implications are clear, but only clear in as much as what the audience are able to infer in

that enacted moment. The referential indirectness to transgressive acts is crucial, especially when thinking through these dialogic instants of unaddressed deeds within the spatial setup of a glass-walled house. For here, it would only seem that all events and action could only be too easily observed and affirmed, but reality often suggests the contrary.

The aesthetics of imperceptibility and fragmentation places a demand on cognition for the fulfilling of narratorial and dialogic gaps. In *Ibsen House*, the signification of the wound lies precisely in its covertness as violent manoeuvres are not only implicitly modelled but are also more affectively rendered as shapeshifting wounds that never quite dissipate. As Noë emphasises, visual experience is not limited to that which is within our sightlines but can include even "something that is manifestly out of view" (Noë 2012, 15-16). In the aforementioned scenes between Fleur and Caroline, as well as Thomas and Frédérique, key revelatory moments are often subsumed within other ongoing action and never part of a dramatic monumental reveal. While acts of transgressions are occluded in *Ibsen House*, I suggest that they are somehow still visible in as much sense as one can possibly make of them in their mediated states.

An audience presented with these moments may find themselves caught within an uncomfortable dialectic of factual recount and speculative projection. There is an intricate semiosis at play which not only applies to the dissection of narrative, but also imbricates the audience in its momentary revelation where presencing is experienced as a collective event where utterances are witnessed as a social body. In the absence of real-time observation by the audience, the potential reality of a violent act is still significant, even if unsubstantiated. It points to a psychological state that not only pertains to the stage, but also assimilates the possible mental predicament of a present audience within a broader social commentary on trauma and the sexual exploitation of minors in culture—particularly that which extends from a domestic space and is enshrouded by an ungraspable distance and time.

Conclusion: Presencing the Wound

The presencing of traumatic wounds in *Ibsen House* has only been made possible through the convening of embodied spaces. In this chapter, I developed *presencing* as an approach for the study of traumatic wounds in performance, introducing the concept of *presencing* as a methodology for examining relational dynamics and the knowledge it might bring forth. Accounts of trauma in *Ibsen House* are necessarily mediated ones. As can be observed in *Ibsen House*, the experience of trauma can often feel elusive in their movement and affective transmissibility across space, time, and bodies. As such, it is my sense that the production of the play succeeds in conveying a physiological and psychological account of traumatic distresses precisely because these wounds are never apprehended directly in performance. It was therefore crucial from the outset to responsively approach the relation between spectator and spectated in *Ibsen House* so as to understand the shapeshifting topologies of traumatic wounds.

At its core, *presencing* as a method is a study of how bodies relate. The performance of traumatic wounds in *Ibsen House* has been examined using three frameworks of the material, temporal, and cognitive. Each context brings to fore certain contextual and foundational knowledge about traumatic wounds, but also collectively guides us toward a more nuanced understanding of what the spectatorship of traumatic wounds entails. As I had surmised, material presencing brings together a number of associated factors such as proximity, visuality, and semiology. The material presencing of wounds in *Ibsen House* may only address representational compositions but it is this quality of enactment that makes for empathically potent experiences. Encountered visually, its semiological dimension is also critical as it suggests the possibility of a wider socio-political context. A similar point on the sociology and performative politics of trauma was also made under the frameworks of temporal and cognitive presencing where we had expounded upon the work of reflexive sense

dimensions in the process of spectating and how it contributes to an affiliate understanding of a spectatorship of the wound.

The presencing of wounds comprises itself a performative politics. This has been suggested in how sensory and cognitive data together amplifies the tacit convention of quiet spectatorship that belies the contemporary modernist play, where polite offerings of attentiveness permeate the house of the auditorium, causing spectators to not only become affiliate members of the same traumatic encounters, but also of an inflected resistance. These conditions of spectatorial silence and passivity point us toward the potentiality of action. It is a potentiality that hovers over all present at the time of the performance event, and it remains precisely as such—a potentiality that is never acted upon. Arguably, convention in the contemporary theatre dictates this, but I conclude with such a point to precisely emphasise that which may seem blatantly obvious in the setup of *Ibsen House*. Importantly, it reminds us of the ubiquitous sense of an impasse that Berlant so duly notes in her characterising of crisis as being part of the everyday. Indeed, the negotiation of trauma is often individual, yet simultaneously wrought within already existent impasses prolonged by societal convention. As is clear, it is this gathering of bodies in a shared present that potentiates critical knowledge and self-realisations.

Chapter 3

The Shape/s of Affect

> *Our sense of reciprocity with the world as it appears, our sense of what a person should do and expect, our sense of who we are as a continuous scene of action, shape what becomes our visceral intuition about how to manage living.*
>
> *— Lauren Berlant, Cruel Optimism*

Introduction: To Live in Time

Let us turn to another work to begin this chapter: *The Shape of Water* (2017), the fantasy romance film by Guillermo del Toro. The film begins with a figure sleeping, floating, in a house of water. She awakes in what seems like the same house, now on dry land, the same greenish tinge of the undersea. Making her way to a filled bath, we recognise that this is but a moment in a day in a constant routine. She tears from a paper calendar, the converse side printed with a daily thought: "Time is but a river flowing from our past." We soon learn that she does not speak. We also learn that her name is Elisa. Elisa clocks in at work as a cleaning lady, a fluid habituated manner of living and of working, seemingly of ease. Later in the film, Elisa becomes drawn towards a captured humanoid amphibian held in the facility at which she worked at. On the threat of impending death, Elisa decides to rescue the creature and nurse it back to health. Unfortunately, her actions were discovered by the facility's Colonel who pursues their trail to the docks on a rainy day. A shooting ensues, forcing a final escape by the humanoid amphibian. Drawn by water, it carries Elisa towards the sea, a return to the deep where Elisa's former scars from her infancy show themselves to be gills. For Elisa, this marks is the end of one world, but also, the beginning—or return—to a former.

The Shape of Water is a story marked by flows. One event flowing into another, it affirms the aphorism from Elisa's calendar that speaks of time as a river flowing from the past. We learn that Elisa herself was found by a river. The memory of water is embodied in her. Instincts of a past are conjured through ordinarily realised memories, fluid fragments of

an un-navigable history which find their return in the daily present. Elisa's story then, is also one of intuition guided by water. Elisa comes across as mostly well-negotiated with her reality, although we see too that hers is a world of managed difference being mute in a world of the speaking. Words fail her—and so, she gestures. She intuits of people around her, negotiating her own survival within these very spaces. Water is always present in Elisa's world. Led by virtual and material presences of sensations, she enacts the fluidity of water into daily living. A morphing entity, a river flowing through time. We are given many glimpses of how water matters to Elisa. Even still, we may not entirely understand how it altogether comes to matter until these moments coalesce like little droplets of rain into a flood. It leads her to the presence of another who is like her, a kinship that steers both the humanoid and Elisa from this world back into their former. The intuition of water is a force that has come to guide Elisa's every move, seemingly second nature, but also one refined through time and practice; a "trained thing, not just autonomic activity" (Berlant 2011, 52).

To see *The Shape of Water* as a work of affect would have us attend to the dynamic forces that serve the inclination of the body to action, as does nature's propensity to persevere. It tethers to instinct, operating below the skin in the subterranean, just as the pull of water in Elisa's negotiation of dry land. Like Elisa, there is something of the Kerkmans' past in *Ibsen House* that always seems to reside in proximity to how events unfold; something of the atmosphere that is never quite reducible to end or origin. Compositionally, we may perhaps sense this through the sequencing of events in *Ibsen House* which carries audiences between past and present in a harried tango, every action begetting some form of a reaction till it is no longer possible to distinguish between the two. But this also suggests the recurring work of affect in the unfolding story of the Kerkmans, a case of what it means to live in time: every moment is intensely lived, intensely felt.

Sequences of time are complexly woven in *Ibsen House*. Curiously, the performance

unfolds from an intermediate moment. The year is 1974, neither beginning nor end. Lena and Jacob appear to be arguing as a young couple in their twenties, agitating about next steps for their immediate futures. Time skips to several decades later in 2004, Lena and Jacob are now much older and divorced. The hands of time are turned back again, and we arrive at a scene from even earlier moment in 1969 where most of Kerkman family are represented (with the notable exception of Caroline: cousin to Lena, niece of Cees). Lena and her brother Sebastiaan are but teenagers here. The family is gathered for the birthday of Cees. Advancing yet again, we arrive at another gathering thirty years into the future—this time, to mark Cee's death and funeral. Caroline is present this time, although much resented by many members of the Kerkman's. Time oscillates and a flashback follows. A revelatory scene: we see that Caroline had been at the house in 1969 before she was turned away. Truths are traded about the Kerkmans, especially—but not only—between Cees and Caroline where therein suggested is an open secret of abuse and dependence. This oscillation of events—gaslighting, anger, lies—through past and present continues throughout the play, where aggrieved memories are encountered variedly in bits and pieces. As *Ibsen House* proceeds, coherent singularities of time cease to feature, as if time has imploded upon itself. At a point even, time no longer just oscillates. We even find two or more periods simultaneously presented in one. Past and present come together in a mushy sphere of impossible time where no temporal logic would seem to even matter or exist.

Mirrored in affect, the sinews of traumatic wounds are sensed through all its scenes. In the first chapter, we surveyed the house as an ever-present entity, an unwitting voyeurism into instances of the traumatic but also of heedful oblivion. In the second chapter, we examined the relational dynamics between spectator and spectated in *Ibsen House*, with presencing construed as an active process of empathy and interpretation, a mediative application of knowledge to intuit traumatic wounds. As a continued inquiry into traumatic

affects, this chapter asks: *In Ibsen House, how are traumatic affects unfolding within a fragmented memory of time?* Here, I follow from Berlant's use of presentist genres to track the ways in which affect figures variously in patterns of response. As argued, trauma is a shapeshifting topology that takes on many forms as it moves through space, time, and bodies. What this chapter seeks to examine, is how patterns of response by characters of *Ibsen House* may provide insight into the temporal character of traumatic affects. Indeed, how does the work of affect show up in the lives of the Kerkmans? *Ibsen House* as work of performance, is itself temporally composed. My approach as such, will be largely descriptive as I track temporal genres of crises in the life of the Kerkmans. For as long as they can manage, we see the Kerkmans attempt and develop practices for coping. In this chapter, I examine how traumatic affects are mediated and transposed in temporal gesticulations of the everyday.

A(ffe)ctivity in the Present

Affect, as Berlant offers, is what mediates the present before the present is determined as anything else:

> If the present is not at first an object but a mediated affect, it is also a thing that is sensed and under constant revision, a temporal genre whose conventions emerge from the personal and public filtering of the situations and events that are happening in an extended now whose very parameters (when did "the present" begin?) are also always there for debate. (Berlant 2011, 4)

The work of affect has been central to my analysis of what constitutes being alive in *Ibsen House,* in its temporal leaps between past, present and future, overlapping with the one and many presences of our time as spectating audience. In the introductory chapter to this thesis, I traced the instinctual aspects of affect within an affective neuroscience which acknowledges its evolutionary beginnings. As Panksepp notes, "affective experiences may be the earliest form of "mind" that existed in life on earth" (Panksepp 2017, 141). It is affect that comprises the survival instincts so necessary to the survival of a species. Likewise, in as much as what a theatre going experience may encompass, my address of *Ibsen House* not only contemplates

the ambit of feelings, logic, possibilities propounded through the narrative—that is, how the Kerkmans manage crisis as lived—but also affections as altogether sensed by a present audience. The presencing of crisis is how I have referred to states of being collectively at hand, an interpretive act of the witnessing of trauma across fragmentary timelines in *Ibsen House*. By being present, we partake of time. By being present, we also partake of affections. As long we find ourselves in contemplation of the stage, of the house, of the collective, we too become of it: "we are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it" (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994, 169).

In the vernacular, affect is often spoken interchangeably with emotions. But while they function very closely, affect theorists like Eric Shouse and Brian Massumi have also argued how they are manifestly different: "emotion and affect—if affect is intensity—follow different logics and pertain to different orders" (Massumi 1995, 88). What is particular about affect is how it captures a force of the undercurrent, a rolling energy. But it can also be subtle. Affect is surely the composite of sensation, but whether it drives one to act or say something is quite another matter. It may or may not be reflected in emotions that are expressed. Bolstered through words, movements, juxtapositions, affect sometimes remains but a felt sensation. Emotions and affect may often seem to run parallel, but we must be careful not to see them as one and the same.

Affect is often described in fairly abstract terms. There is no one originary definition or state of what Affect is, as so many from Gregory J. Seigworth to Nigel Thrift have expressed in their deliberations on the subject: "Affect arises in the midst of in-between-ness" (Seigworth & Gregg 2010, 1); "The problem that must be faced straight away is that there is no stable definition of affect" (Thrift 2004, 59). But there are some statements that guide. Spinoza is quoted often: "By affect I understand the affections of the body, by which the power of acting of the body itself is increased, diminished, helped, or hindered, together with

the ideas of these affections" (E3P3). Shouse himself expresses, "An affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential" (Shouse 2005). Where emotions are personal and offer an indicator of the self within settings of the social, affect is at its core, different in how it motions on the level of the unconscious; "irreducibly bodily and autonomic" (Massumi 1995, 89).

Let us turn to *Ibsen House* to think this through further. There is a scene where Johanna sights her husband Cees and teenage niece Caroline in a tensed and heated argument from a corner in their house. It is night time. This domestic exchange is unusually intimate for a conversation between an uncle and his younger relative. One might expect Johanna to have been vexed by the sight of this social situation, but instead, she overcompensates with a great display of care for Caroline, generously offering their couch to spend the night, announcing thorough plans for the morning after. Johanna seemed almost unsurprised by the scene, as if such varieties of exchanges have in the past been similarly encountered. Contemplating Johanna, we become sensorily one with her for a moment in time. In our affective consciousness of onstage happenings, we may begin to notice the dual comportments of emotions and affect. What is sensed may not tally with what is expressed. Affect and emotion: there is no formula for discernment, but we may only turn to that which presides between the lines, beneath the surface, and intuited through our very bodies (Williams 1977). For affect is always changing; it is never fully formed. The work of affect is never singular in the way that emotions often appear to be.

The relationship between that which is outwardly visible and the affective trail that time illuminates is critical for evaluating how the Kerkmans discern and respond to crisis. How we sense the transmission of affect through bodies, through scenes, is as much about what is overtly expressed through the sequences and characters, as well as what has been occluded from performance. And this is the task at hand: to track the way of temporal genres

in the presencing of crisis. For Berlant's claim is also mine: If the present is a temporal genre, mediated first by affect, then affect necessarily shapes how the present is sensed (Berlant 2011, 4). In *Ibsen House*, affect sits at the relational core of how trauma fuses with time, the gradual structuring of transgenerational crisis built upon tensions, secrets, and unspecified distance. Affect is a virtual force—first sensed, then revealed as emotion or action, or perhaps not at all. The shape of affect is thus really, unqualified, indeterminate, untraceable. And yet, this is also its power, a dynamic that allows affect to persist in its affliction of entities across bodies, spaces, and atmospheres. But affect might seem to just as quickly disappear as it encroaches. It is the stuff of atmospheres, sometimes appearing as if a dense cloud, sometimes a mere breeze. But that is enough for providing a trail of impressions, of the potentiality of action.

The shape of affect as transposed in activity simply illustrates evolved responses towards fraught moments of conflict and crisis which are already ongoing. Indicators abound, sometimes even sensed through residual atmospheres from a time before time. Previously with *The Shape of Water*, I had suggested that Elisa's negotiation of time on dry land emerges from the forces of affect, although until these urges (of water) are looked at in hindsight, she knows not how and why. In *Ibsen House*, we have examined how the Kerkmans seem unconsciously bound by forces from their pasts which impact upon how they apprehend their present. For this chapter, I plan to follow Berlant's development of the "intuition" as sensed and developed through practice, where affect becomes organised in processes that aid in the structuring of life (Berlant 2011, 52). But this too, has to be evaluated contemporaneously. These practiced forms are always changing, as new traumas, new needs, new situations, are also always emergent. As Massumi states, "Affect is a point of entry into an eventful, relational field of complexity that is already active, and still open-ended" (Massumi 2015, 151). I suggest then, that affective activity may be thought of as a

steering of exigent forces into structures that makes sense, even if just for a moment in time.

In the following sections of this chapter, I follow from Berlant's tracking of intuition in her book and trace three temporal forms in *Ibsen House*—or what I also call shapes of affect—that point to patterns of adjustment in the presencing of crisis. The first is the form of 'conversation' that Berlant also develops in her analysis of Gregg Bordowitz's film *Habit* (2001)—an autobiographical documentary film about the AIDS epidemic where conversations provide "experimental modes of staying tethered to life" through the sharing of knowledge (Berlant 2011, 57). In *Ibsen House* however, conversations factor differently, operating more as orientation mechanisms for the determination of self which has been overwhelmed by the fluxes of trauma. The second is the form of 'deviation,' identifiable as distancing mechanisms enacted through practices of avoidance. Here, 'deviation' contributes to a reciprocal delay or affectivity of distance, catering to modes of protection or self-preservation. The third is the form of the 'episode' which is really a case of temporal segmentation. It is a mechanism of memory for preserving sensations of time as episodic blocks so as to not lose track of the self in its fragmentation through trauma. My approach configures the 'episodic memory' as developed by the experimental psychologist Endel Tulving (2002) within accounts of the traumatic, fixating on what the non-sequential organisation of *Ibsen House* reveals about the work of affect.

Through these studies, I attend to how affect is organised through crisis, by crisis. Although, the forms of organisation that I am referring to are not so much those that pertain to a well-oiled system promising survival, but more a means of subsistence that people partake in habitually—and also warily—to survey their own limits of endurance.

Form 1 – Conversation

When Sebastiaan is first introduced, he is fifteen years old. The son of Cees and Johanna, brother to Lena, and cousin to Caroline, his part in the undulating history of the

Kerkman's initially manifests as but a figure on the side-lines. Sebastiaan seems to float in and out of social settings and conversations, content to disappear when overridden by another: his father. When contrasted with the fondness that his father Cees exhibits for Lena, the disdain that Cees expresses toward Sebastiaan is clear but also mystifying. There are many clues, yet none are plainly inferable. Sebastiaan's homelife is one of strained discomfort. Conversations in the home are aplenty, but Sebastiaan always features on the periphery. On Cee's birthday, we see Sebastiaan slighted by his father who often remarks upon him caustically, although occasionally—and unusually—Sebastiaan is also met with some words of care. Teenage Sebastiaan drifts between indifference and anxiety, sometimes playing the dutiful role of son, but also making a habit of sidestepping further conflict by leaving the scene whenever confronted so as to avoid any probable clashes.

While Berlant notes that conversations in *Habit* have a common aim in contributing to evolving networks of knowledge for survival, conversations in *Ibsen House* are where inhibited selves find clarification as affective utterances, initiating a play of impassioned verbal moves as parties seek out strategies to induce awareness or change in another. There could be many reasons why Cees relishes picking on Sebastiaan. At a point, it was revealed that Cees is himself a victim of abuse by his own father. Conversations suggest to us how immanent affects of past traumas metamorphosise in these exchanges of words. Derision perhaps, is how Cees combats these memories through Sebastiaan, who is male like he is but also (hopefully) different as Cees declares aloud in conversations with his family as if to make a point of his character assessment—even if only meaningful for Cees himself.

CEES. *Hij is zo vreselijk gevoelig, Lenaatje.* (He's so terribly sensitive, Lenaatje.)

LENA. *Hij is vijftien.* (He's fifteen years old.)

CEES. *Ik was niet zo toen ik vijftien was.* (I was never like that when I was fifteen.)

LENA. *Hij is jou niet.* (He's not you.)

We may find in Sebastiaan—through the figure and image of a boy—the quality of an affective object or relation as sensed by Cees. It seems to me that Cees is given to feelings of contempt and manages these visceral emotions by directing them towards another. The ridicule of Sebastiaan could very well be aggression displaced from Cees' own self, his own past, although I admit that this is quite a sympathetic perspective given the circumstances. Spinoza expresses that "for as long as we recollect the object, although it does not actually exist, we contemplate it as present, and the body is affected in the same way as if it were present" (E3P47). Conversations become a way for Cees to contemplate the emotions and hostilities of his own past, albeit indirectly transposed and expressed in interactions in his present.

In these exchanges, conversations either expose a continued repression, an internal wound festering under the surface. Or otherwise, it points to the possibility of foreseeable change, however promising or ill-advised it might be. These outcomes are not discrete, and it is often unclear if one would result or the other. While Sebastiaan generally avoids arguments with Cees, he speaks plainly to his mother Johanna who responds with little emotion—a practised oblivion honed through time, as we would come to understand. Sebastiaan expresses that he is tired of pretence in the family where everything is always construed to be okay. Indeed, we do hear the Kerkmans say time and again: *Het is OK* (It is OK). Of course, I do not believe that all is well with the Kerkmans, nor they of themselves. These words are an instinctual response honed through time, the affective bindings of normativity that plagues the family through and through. I also attend to this behavioural tendency as a symptom of denial, although I do not think of denial as an intentional act, but rather a tendency that is

again, honed through time and practice. I will expand on this point in the subsequent section.

As multiple time periods are enmeshed in the latter half of the play, we also see several crises entangled in one. Conversations are converging points where traumatic affects become organised as utterances. At a point, we find ourselves in the year of Sebastiaan's death, though he is still alive for the time. How Sebastiaan eventually passes, we know not exactly how. But here are some exchanges with his mother Johanna that we are given to witness. Adult Sebastiaan reveals that he is afflicted with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). He also tells of his boyfriend Ulrich's degenerative final days from supposedly of the same. For Sebastiaan, the nearness of death is often one that does not come soon enough. In a heated conversation, Sebastiaan challenges Johanna to make a point of her life, even if this means to take his very own. Survival for Sebastiaan, means to move speedily and evasively, but also, firmly—even if this means to fast track death.

SEBASTIAAN. *Dat is wat ik wil dat je doet. Ik wil dat je een kussen neemt en het over mijn gezicht legt en een slaapliedje zingt en zo lang blijft drukken tot ik niet meer kan ademen. Tot je ziet dat mijn armen niet meer spartelen. Het zou het meest oprechte zijn wat je ooit hebt gedaan.* (That's what I want you to do. I want you to take a pillow and put it over my face and sing a lullaby and push down until I can't breathe anymore. Until you see my arms stop twitching. It'll be the most honest thing you've ever done.)

JOHANNA. *Nee.* (No.)

SEBASTIAAN. *Dan kan je zeggen dat je mijn moeder bent geweest. Je kan om me rouwen als me hebt gedood.* (Then you can say you were my mother. You can mourn me once you've killed me.)

These conversations are situated amongst an affective backdrop of past turmoil as sensed from the beginning and all through to its end. In a world that is (and always has been) spinning out of control, death has its seductions. A self-warranted death would perhaps at least allow one to hold on to what is left of their autonomy where much have at a point been taken, gone missing. Death at the very least, is one form of a resolution—for illness, for inaction, for troubled relations. To this end, what the finality of death promises and signals through these conversations is the potential for breaking out of the impasse of their shared historical present where so many in the Kerkman household have eschewed necessary confrontation.

If we are to infer through Berlant's inscribed hallmarks of intuitive activity that are singularly construed but also experienced communally, what Sebastiaan asks and demands of Johanna can also be perceived as a collective reprimand unto himself, similar to my earlier analysis of Cees disparagement of Sebastiaan. But Johanna's feeble and distant disposition is also worth examining, if only to tease out patterns of adjustment demonstrated as well by other Kerkmans:

JOHANNA. *Wat had ik kunnen doen?* (What could I have done?)

SEBASTIAAN. *Dingen herstellen. Hem verlaten. Ons met je meenemen. Hem laten opsluiten. Hem doden. Waarom heb je hem niet gedood?* (Fixed things. Left him. Taken us with you. Sent him to jail. Killed him. Why didn't you kill him?)

JOHANNA. *Hij was mijn man.* (He was my husband.)

SEBASTIAAN. *Hij heeft je gebruikt. Jij was het eerste kleine meisje dat hij heeft verleid. En toen je ouder werd, verloor hij zijn interesse, net zoals bij alle anderen en hij gebruikte jou. En jij was dankbaar. Omdat je de enige was die hij niet dumpte.* (He used

you. You were the first little girl he seduced. And when you got older, he lost interest, the same way he did with all the others and he used you. And you were grateful. Because you were the only one he didn't throw away.)

JOHANNA. *HOU OP. HOU JE MOND. NU.* (SHUT UP. SHUT YOUR MOUTH. NOW.)

At first glance, these social interactions seem to hint at Johanna's oblivion to all that is around her. But what these exchanges with Sebastiaan also reveal or suggest is how it is through intuited avoidance that Johanna manages to endure. It seems to be the only way that Johanna knows to persevere through crisis. Her method is such: If we do not speak of it, it is not true; if we do not attend to it, it disappears. Conversations in *Ibsen House* are relational tools that help individuals assess possible ways of moving forward. Conversations offer Sebastiaan a last-ditch attempt to counter the traumatic affects that have long silenced the Kerkman family. If anything, the conversational exchanges of *Ibsen House* suggest to us the inherent complexity of any person or collective's attempt to evolve solutions for survival.

Form 2 – Deviation

As far as solutions go, 'deviation' exists as a trained reflex for many of the Kerkmans. In this section, I explore how affective distance is shaped through the genre of 'deviation' by focusing on Lena's life trajectory. Lena's childhood seems plain sailing enough, but the stresses of normativity are crumbling, and life soon begins to dither from the straight path. In general, the OED describes 'deviation' as an action or state of swerving, of deflection, of "divergence from the straight line." In *Ibsen House*, the 'deviation' is routinely practiced as a mode of self-preservation. It is a performative compliance with bad tempers, of bad behaviours, a sense that time would make all well, that time can will all crises away. In its contemporaneous rejection of reality, the 'deviation' also releases one from the demands of

appropriate response. In adversity, Lena's method is to avoid confrontation. And as do many in the family, Lena often chooses silence.

To consider 'deviation' as a shaping of affect, I focus on its function as a distancing mechanism enacted through modes of deflection and denial: an affective aversion. Wielded as a shield, 'deviation' differs from 'conversation' or the more forceful variation of confrontation as it is not an exchange or collision of forces but the use of affective distance to forestall a sensed dissolution of the self. It is a repeated logic, a response finessed in time for the minimisation of undesirable impacts. The deviation therefore also enforces temporal distance, off-setting threats that fly in the face of trauma, but which always finds their return another day, another cycle in time. In the context by which it is practised in *Ibsen House*, 'deviation' also goes by other names: avoidance, aversion, denial, ignorance, and erasure.

The state of relations is such that there always seems to be an emergent chasm within the family. Scenes of love and crisis often feature simultaneously, particularly in Lena's relationship with Jacob whose relationship bookmarks the start and end of *Ibsen House*. In terms of chronology, what the first scene really marks is the middle of Lena's life. At the beginning, we watch a domestic scene unfold between a young couple through glass walls. Lena is the young woman here. She seems to have just spent the night with the man, Jacob, and has now made breakfast for him. They begin to argue. Lena is asking for a break from Jacob, much to his anger and confusion. A scene soon follows with another man. Their exchanges are cordial but not entirely pleasant. We learn that Lena was once married to this person. In these interactions, what becomes clear is Lena's confusion and indecision about how best to move forward. Scene after scene, Lena cycles through the same emotions as an adult from her twenties, and later as well in her fifties where we see Lena and Jacob married, but also on the brink of divorce. Given that our introduction to circumstances often occurs at an intermediary moment of ongoing action, it is difficult to make sense of enacted tensions

until the very end. Aversions to intimacy can only be gauged through the state of relations as sensed, as conditions are never quite determined nor articulated.

Adult relationships become for Lena testbeds for a determination of the self that is always dithering on the edges of crisis. What is surprising about the depiction of Lena's story as compared to the others is that for the most part of Lena's childhood, she seems relatively well-adjusted. If we are to observe Lena's relationship with her father Cees and later in Lena's demeanour during the funeral of Cees, Lena appears to be the compliant, dutiful daughter, eager to protect an agreeable public sentiment of the family. Lena is clearly well-loved by Cees but not all is well. There are moments I remember well as an audience. In one instance during the crowded birthday scene of Cees, teenage Lena who was performed by a young woman leaped happily into the arms and lap of Cees, a much older man who was performing the role of her father in the play. While this scene ostensibly points to displays of love, they also gesture towards something potentially more disturbing. As an audience, the gesture struck me as a momentary horror. Performed as it were, the interaction came across as inappropriate and questionable. Crucially, none of the Kerkmans had so much as batted an eyelid. Strange, but also telling, given that the moment only unfolded fleetingly in the central living space of the house, centre to all action, and in full view of the immediate and extended family—as well as of course the auditorium of spectating audiences.

There are other tragic outcomes of affective distancing that may not be physically observed. Avoidance is one expression of 'deviation' which Lena tends towards; an avoidance intuited into practice. It was Lena's denial of crisis, as well as her mother and grandmother before, that gave Cees protection, while eventually leading to the suicide of her daughter Fleur. In the second chapter, I had mentioned how Cees' assault of Fleur was revealed in an interaction with Caroline. It is horrifying enough to know of this, but doubly so when it is revealed through conversation that Lena, who is Fleur's mother, had known of

Cee's predilections but took no preventive or protective measures. Lena continues downplaying the incident, gaslighting Fleur after she had confided in her. An affective attachment to the family is compounded with the affective distancing of crisis. When the problematic emerges often under the guise of love, Lena gradually finds herself unable to discern between the two and reacts similarly to both so that life might at least still go on. Optimism flows into trauma and ventures back again in an endless loop. In this sense, deviation also prolongs. It constitutes not prevention nor restitution, but a distancing practice trained into habit, a tragic intuition bound to inaction.

Form 3 – Episode

In this third and final section, I explore the genre of the 'episode' which is one form of an emerging event, delimiting action through categories of time (Berlant 2011, 5). In *Ibsen House*, the past made present is always recounted in episodes. When trauma disrupts memory's constitution, making certain events impossible to recollect such as the most heinous of acts committed by Cees which are never performed on the stage, peripheral occasions still find themselves ascribed in episodes, compounds of sense memory, while offering temporal lines of references.

In my analysis, the 'episode' functions as a category of recall, offering a means of tracking and comparing patterns of adjustment through times of crisis. The framework of 'episodic memory' will be appropriated to guide my study of how affect is sensed, intuited, and remembered. According to Tulving, episodic memory "makes possible mental time travel through subjective time, from the present to the past, thus allowing one to re-experience, through autonoetic awareness, one's own previous experiences" (Tulving 2002, 5). The 'episodic memory' provides a way of generating milestones for remembrance. It is also how *Ibsen House* is composed as a work of performance. As such, the sense memory of affect may find organisation within sporadic accounts of realism as it is by its own, a formless and

unqualified compound of sensation.

Earlier, we noted how genres of ‘conversation’ and ‘deviation’ all depend on the function of memory—and indeed, through the organisation of ‘episodic memory’—to develop intuitions for coping. Reflecting on the narratorial composition of *Ibsen House,* I suppose the question to be asked is also this: why has the memory of the Kerkman house been recounted in episodes, and in particular, non-sequential episodes? How time is organised in such oscillatory moves is itself an affective compound that relies not on a narrative logic of progressive time but a reflection of the multidirectional echoes of crisis at hand. It has also been demonstrated, that our choosing to recollect events through either member of the Kerkmans has consequences as to what perceptive and affective details are foregrounded, how fast or how deep each moment would seem to relate, and indeed how these details contribute to the instantiation of knowledge. My elaboration of the ‘conversation’ through Sebastiaan, Johanna, and Cees produces different insights from my elaboration of ‘deviation’ through Lena, Jacob, and Fleur, although there are still some similarities pertaining to habituated responses relating to trauma and crisis across time and generations.

In performance, we are given to encounter these accounts and the affective manner of their subjective enactments simultaneously, much as we also become one with them. In presencing the same *time,* we suffer of the same *flesh* and encounter of the same affective structure of relations. I borrow from Deleuze and Guattari’s analogy of the “flesh” (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994, 183) to contemplate a work of performance such as *Ibsen House*, positing that time makes of the flesh that which installs affect into affection. In *Ibsen House* which reproduces the work of memory, the mediation of time is that which supports the entity of the house. The house is the only constant character unfolding in time, as does flesh in these affective becomings: “a passage from the finite to the infinite, but also from territory to

deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 1994, 180). Time disappears in these compounds of sensation, a becoming of sense memory as variously felt.

Episodic time enacts segmentations of memory that hosts the sensory becoming of the world. This is not the same as chronological developments that would point to two different houses. The first house that we gaze upon at the opening, the stunning glass-walled holiday home designed and built by Daniel and Cees, is at a point burned down by Lena and Jacob. The second house is that which was rebuilt by Caroline, although we do not see it fully come into form. This second house also suffers a similar fate and is burned down by Caroline in a momentous finale scene. Two houses with two beginnings and two ends. In performance however, the above houses are presented as compounds of affective evolution ('birth'), and compounds of affective dissolution ('death').

This does not refer to the same sequences captured by the descriptive categories of 'day' and 'night' introduced in the first chapter. To clarify these distinctions, it would be most apt to connect the 'night' visions of the house—that is, the skeletal house as seen in the second half of Ibsen House—with the affective 'birth' of both houses. 'Birth' scenes of the two houses are grouped together, each borne from frictional viewpoints between the Kerkmans. 'Death' scenes of the two houses are also grouped together, each with an eventual realisation that the degenerative optimism that binds them to the promise of the house is in fact, irredeemable. These moments have been composed through subjectivised time that tend towards its affective resemblances. Two courses of time are simultaneously produced, circulating affects of a similar register.

As demonstrated, the 'episode' serves as the organisation of affective relations in times of crisis. Objectivised history often makes for too structured a retelling that distances itself from the affective labour of its occurrence and place in memory. Such moves in any form of reorganisation also alter the artwork and interfere with the shape of affect as

performatively encountered. My reformed and condensed description of Stone's work—where he as writer and director is accordingly then, the presenter, inventor, and creator of these formulations of affects—may be subjected to a similar critique as it is nary a replica of how these sequences are performed and encountered. My descriptions of *Ibsen House* should understandably be taken as comparative guide and not the work itself regardless of how sincerely and accurately I had intended to convey of these affections and perceptions implied. Affect as encountered in *Ibsen House* is necessarily shaped via the episodic organisation of subjective time, core to how sense memories of trauma have been first intuited and directly experienced first-hand. Time in *Ibsen House* is constituent flesh. As such, any reorganisation through language also reproduces an altered body of work.

Conclusion: Temporal Gestures

The present is always here at hand. When it begins? When it ends? I do not know. But to live in time, to share in time, is to tarry in affect through whichever composite of sensation it carries forth. The shape of affect can be tempestuous, deflective, or innumerably composed of time's infinite movements. What the events within *Ibsen House* suggest time and again is a fragmented continuity of how trauma is brought to bear in the collision of different forces. The broken line of time splits memory into its sections. Through this however, we become cognisant of crisis through multiple units of presences. These presences in turn, offer a perception of responsive patterns, intuited strategies, and responses for coping with the varied undercurrents of affect trailing through all of subjective time as performed and recollected in *Ibsen House*.

To be affected is a form of presencing where crisis is empathically sensed and cohered with our bodies in process. To surmise, I have endeavoured to demonstrate how such affects are channelled in process, how traumatic topologies are shaped and reshaped across worlds through a variety of moves. The shape of affect is not so much identified as a system

of recall through the proceedings of the ‘conversation,’ ‘deviation,’ and the ‘episode,’ but sensed through its temporal gestures: the ‘conversation’ *orientates*, the ‘deviation’ *distances*, and the ‘episode’ *survives* through sensory milestones of memory. The Kerkmans are steeped within these affect spheres and always endeavouring to pave their way around it. As audience, we too are consumed in these intensities as we tarry with them, residing with them even at periodic junctures. The shaping of affect may also sometimes comprise an impasse, as we may observe in how so many like Johanna and Lena seem so intent to keep their head above water but only by taking their eyes away from all that flows beneath.

Within a sea of affect, it matters that you *feel* you know its parts, you *think* you know its ends. The impasse of the present is what Berlant accounts for as a marker of trauma. But impasse belongs also within an activist genre, in cut up episodes spliced along an entangled continuum, where the presencing of crisis is viewed not just through action or inaction, singular or collective mediations, but a back and forth between myriad states of being, where the shape of affect emerges as flows of intensities that are sensed and intuited into temporal proceedings of action, procession, and conative activity.

Chapter 4

Ibsen House: An Ecological Perspective

An ecology of the virtual is thus just as pressing as ecologies of the visible world.
— Félix Guattari, Chaosmosis

Introduction: No Trauma is an Island

Ecology comes from the word *ökologie,* coined by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel from the ancient Greek word *οἶκος* ("oikos") meaning "house, dwelling place" and *λογία* ("logie") meaning "character, action, or department of knowledge" (OED). In my research, *Ibsen House* has been my case study of choice for an inquiry into the ecology of domestic traumas within private and public spheres. Consulting the etymological basis of "ecology," I suppose the expressed trajectory and the title of the selected production already suggests certain ideas as to how spatial environments are imagined to function. The subject of space and its affiliation with the infrastructure of trauma within a performance context was addressed in the first chapter. But far from being a straightforward metaphor bound in the literal or structural, what I have attempted to cultivate is a comprehensive account of *Ibsen House*'s many facets and qualities as a live production which may guide one affectively towards a contemplation of prevalent social systems.

The "oikos" or dwelling place is only such because of context. It exists because of its conceptual, situational, and relational entanglements. The notion of the house as a unit of society seems simple enough, but to look beyond what is visible, to consider its web of relations, makes for the elusive endeavour that is more demanding to realise. As addressed in previous chapters, my analysis of the 'house' is not just in reference to the central set piece and its revolving characters, but also the auditorium where spectators are convened and the kinds of presencing that a live performance can entail. It is therefore *through* the house that trauma finds itself in mediation. In other words, it might be said that I have thus far been

engaging with a notion of the house as trauma embodied. Trauma is so often transmutative, transacted through affect, moving through not just bodies, space, and action, but also through its myriad interrelations in *Ibsen House*. Applying the same referential logic, the ecological question regarding trauma then, presents as a play of metaphors, an enactive network of both direct and indirect associations.

As I had hoped to firstly respond to the production as perceived and experienced before weighing up against clinical and theoretical perspectives, I found it necessary to embark on my research in two phases. In the first phase, I had spent time communing with *Ibsen House* as if it were a consulting patient. I did not want a situation where I would find myself narrowly identifying phenomena only to cross-reference with published perspectives on trauma. The initial research process therefore primarily engaged with developing a materialist and performative approach to *Ibsen House*, attending to architecture, language, presence, sense perception and the affectivity of trauma amongst others, as guiding frameworks. In this second phase then, existent insights from trauma studies will be compared with previously cited observations on the production, in ways that I hope would generate insights on the subject matter so as to produce some form of a diagnostic report relevant to its symptoms. This chapter, as part of the second phase, therefore asks: *What does an ecological perspective reveal trauma?* Indeed, what first needs addressing is the question of why one should even think ecologically? Why might it be of import to consider trauma through such perspective?

In recent years, the literary theorist Timothy Morton, through a sustained inquiry into ecological thought, has advocated for a rethinking of the divide that most ecological conversations are sustained on: civilisation versus nature—where the ecological trajectory has as such been so often geared to tracing our entanglements in nature and indeed, the science of relations within nature itself. In fact, Morton explicitly talks about an ‘ecology

without nature' (Morton 2007). He proposes that thinking ecologically, being ecological, is so much more than this solitary obsession, arguing that nature "fails to serve ecology well" with its unnatural qualities such as hierarchy, authority, mystery (Morton 2010, 3). As I also assert after Morton, ecology is not just to do with the natural and environmental sciences, but also of the humanities—and not just, but inclusively taking on every aspect of our co-existence (Morton 2010, 4).

Indeed, the scientific framework of *ecology* as explained through "the branch of biology that deals with the relationship between living organisms and their environment" is but one way of approaching the character and knowledge of our 'house' that is this Earth. It is a topical issue that has become vastly popular in contemporary discourses within the sciences such as with climate change and environmental sustainability, but also increasingly within the humanities. As per terminologies with the prefix of "eco,"—such as in "ecosystems," "ecotourism," ecofriendly"—*ecology* as a field of study often transfixes on systems of relations concerning nature as environment, its care and preservation, and humankind's responsible engagement with it. Aside from the biological sciences, there are also applications of *ecology* in sociology and any operative fields, which simply concerns "the interrelationship between any system and its environment" (OED). In my study of trauma through the production and performance of *Ibsen House*, I align more with the adaptive character of this second definition, which still emphasises how we exist as living organisms within particular environments.

Ecological living, in essence, is being aware of the many entanglements that exist within this world. It was Whitehead who stated: "The physical world is bound together by a general type of relatedness which constitutes it into an extensive continuum" (Whitehead [1929] 1978, 96). The physical world is borne of relations. Ecology concerns heterogenous modes of coexistence, but more than the concrete, it is about understanding how we are

already situationally implicated in environments comprised of innumerable scales and intensities. Morton also explains in his book *The Ecological Thought* (2010):

> Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence. Existence is always coexistence. No man is an island. Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Thinking ecologically isn't simply about nonhuman things. Ecology has to do with you and me. (Morton 2010, 4)

Ecological thinking thus, is about seeking to attune our existence with all that is emergent around us. In this sense, an ecological approach to trauma would ask that we consider the many scales of experience, environs, and relations that mediate how trauma is often brought to bear in the everydayness of our world.

A life lived with trauma is an inherently ecological endeavour where attention needs to be accorded at multiple touchpoints. It is a coming to terms with the everyday; not just an externalised thriving towards as a post-traumatic state of recovery for violence that was mete. An ecological approach to trauma, and particularly of traumatic memory, acknowledges its omnipresence, its trails of intensive activity. As argued in the first chapter, the central motif of the house provides a direct parallel to such semantic context relating to the dwelling place of a family, and thus, more than metaphorically posits an analogy of the ecological. All characters of *Ibsen House* also partake of a familial and societal network enframing their sense of self, continually impacted through their actions and decisions. In the coming together of audiences within the live space of the theatre, I have attempted to demonstrate how *Ibsen House* more than adds to current discourses on contemporary trauma research through the processual methodology of presencing by reifying a model of ecological thinking in how the dynamism of environs are foremost to understanding trauma as more broadly understood through interrelationships—of beings where beings are both human and nonhuman, of bodies where bodies are living and non-living, of spaces where all spaces are to be experienced as otherwise embodied.

One of many Beginnings?

Before we proceed further, the beginnings of the term "trauma" should also be examined. The word "trauma" has its origins in the Greek *τραῦμα* describing a physical wound (OED). In medical fields, trauma continues to refer to injury causing catastrophic effects on the entirety of the body. Today, emergency departments of hospitals are sometimes referred to as trauma centres as they provide critical and specialist response to serious bodily injury. But trauma can also be a result of a mental shock of an encounter, often understood as such in the vernacular where it extends from a physical event and refers to psychological reverberations in the aftermath. Its reverberating impact is critical to note. Trauma, as I have argued of *Ibsen House,* is a shapeshifting topology. It is never simply one or another.

Modern understandings often build upon early conceptions that crosses between the physiological and psychological. For example, in observations of railway incident survivors in the 1860s, the surgeon John Erichson noted how general shocks to the body had resulted in extended symptoms relating to the nervous system after the event (Erichsen 1997). Subsequently in 1889, the neurologist Hermann Oppenheim introduced the concept of 'traumatic neurosis,' a diagnostic category pertaining to molecular damages in the brain. Over time, through the pioneering work on mental afflictions by people like Jean-Martin Charcot, Josef Breur, Pierre Janet, and Sigmund Freud amongst others, the turn of the century saw trauma increasingly addressed as psychological wound (Leys 2000).

Theories and concepts of trauma were then and are still subject to much debate. As per the gendered diagnosis of hysteria in the nineteenth century, many earlier propositions of traumatic disorders have also been debunked or reconceptualised over time. Compared with the early work of the medical community, the theoretical field of trauma studies which guides much evolving contemporary research on the subject today was only established around the 1990s and had primarily arisen from the work of literary theorists who were interested in the

limits of language in representing accounts of trauma and memory. Research material on the field of trauma studies comprises such cross-disciplinary functions and perspectives. It draws in experts from psychological to neurological practitioners, as well as a whole host of cultural disciplines such as memory studies where the question of cultural memory itself often connects individual experience with collective ones—from recollections of events of the Holocaust, September 11, or the many forms of potentially traumatogenic change such as death or high-stress confrontations between loved ones (Sztompka 2004, 159).

Psychological trauma itself is often difficult to delimit and remedy. The possibility of therapy is one of the more fortunate outcomes if it is even to be had. Further action frequently depends on an acknowledgement of continued threat or injury, this being the obvious first step to any potential resolution of crisis or hurt. This is in itself already a hurdle due to the mystifying temperament of traumatic experiences. Even with psychiatrists like Judith Herman whose seminal text of *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992) is known for highlighting domestic abuse and its long-lasting effects on the psyche, the plight of such domiciliary infractions such as is identifiable in *Ibsen House* is unfortunately often owed to secrecy and has still remained comparatively neglected in current discourses on the subject.

The literary scholar Mark Seltzer attends yet to a different social context of trauma. His observations are rather more to do with what he calls the "pathological public sphere," a wound culture propounded no less by the mass media and public interest in the "shock of contact between bodies and technologies: a shock of contact that encodes, in turn, a breakdown in the distinction between the individual and the mass, and between private and public register" (Seltzer 1997, 3). As Seltzer writes in 1997, wound culture can be observed in crime fiction and documentaries, as well as television series such as the popular medical drama *ER*. Trauma as entertainment continues drawing large international viewership,

observable in the innumerable medical dramas over the recent decades like *Scrubs* (2001-2010), *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-present), and *The Good Doctor* (2017-present). While I have quoted all-American examples to emphasise a certain cultural inundation, the trend certainly continues far and wide. In these setups, the wound as bodily infringement and personal suffering is exhibited and witnessed, complicating the tenuous divide between individual and collective experience. These days, the popularity of reality television and social media make for an even drastic crossing of the private and public. Its allure emerges from yet another kind of presencing, a liveness of a moment experienced ahead of the heat of its narrative. They all tap on the same attraction to near death experiences and individual vulnerability exposed as public content. In *Ibsen House*, the presencing of the wound, would however not extend from the thrill and adrenaline of "torn and opened persons" (Seltzer 1997, 3) but rather by its gaps, obscurity, and silence. While I would hesitate to describe *Ibsen House* as exemplifying the symptoms of wound culture as violent scenes are not enacted onstage, I can also see how we might consider it so, as every move within the glass-walled house is set up for public scrutiny. In the following sections, I expand on these foundational understandings of trauma in culture and present three observations on trauma's ecology building on concerns of collective space, relational identity, and networks of sensory phenomena.

The Scenes of Return

Observation 1: Spaces of trauma are always collective ones in a process of becoming. The ecology of trauma can always be traced back to its scene. This has been my claim in *Ibsen House*. The house is an embodied site, a conduit of traumatic events past and repeated. It is also a domestic site, even if functioning primarily as a holiday house in the play's narrative. As a structure, its glass-walled design provides panoramic views of its surrounds, providing the same of viewers from the outside. A blending of insides and outside as it would seem, emblematic of trauma culture's inclination towards the public exposure of things that are

typically private. Where exposure entails a promise, a release, it may arguably be played out for good. But as *Ibsen House* shows, the trouble is that as observer, there seems to be a sense that one often keeps watch for far too long in the realm of the aesthetic such that the divide between insides and outsides, private and public are never truly bridged. One remains in the middle. To understand trauma, one would have to press on to overcome its categorical divide between spectator and spectated, step into its space, and not simply gaze upon a scene as separate from oneself. But such is already the case for those who find themselves afflicted with trauma. The scene is never separate from you. It is already part of your everyday, always already set before you.

Indeed, we see that many like Fleur, Lena, Jacob, Sebastiaan and even Cees would find no escape from the world—and its scene—other than through death of which they cannot separate themselves. If indeed wound culture has analogised trauma with its representation—or its spatialisation, if to follow from Seltzer—its associations may not always be direct or apparent:

> […] the trauma is something like the compulsive return to the scene of the crime—not merely in that the trauma is the product of its repetition, but also in that it is the product, not of an event itself, but of how the subject repeats or represents it to himself. One detects here what might be described as *a binding of trauma to representation or scene*: in order for this return to the scene of the crime to take place, time must be converted to place, act into scene; cause and effect, act and fantasy, perception and representation must change places. (Seltzer 1997, 11-12)

The hotbed of trauma and memory, the "scene of the crime" (Seltzer 1997, 11), can surely be discerned, but just like a case unresolved, it haunts all present as in its demand for inquisition, just as one when afflicted such as Sebastiaan and Caroline, may likewise demand for some form of affirmation. All involved parties are drawn in, and the process of coming to terms with the past *in the present* is always ongoing. Berlant has also described the present as "a place where pasts are spatialised among many elsewheres that converge in the sensorium of the people feeling out the conditions of their historical scene" (Berlant 2011, 17). In

presencing the wound then, bodies and spaces are performing as site where past and present time, inner and outer worlds converge.

Trauma, both process and product, is where time finds itself actualised. Events oscillate between experience and representation, where semblances of a past comes face on with life in the present. With *Ibsen House*, I had previously described the house as not only embodying trauma but also an impasse-engendering "optimistic attachment" (Berlant 2011, 2). I trace this from the house of the auditorium where private bodies assemble to form a distinct spectating community confined in action, but also the voyeuristic see-through glass walls of the set which both invites and separates. As Seltzer argues, trauma is the "coalescence, or collapse, of private and public registers" (Seltzer 1997, 4). The *scene of the crime* never leaves our sightlines, and in this sense, it performs its own past by simply being present. Over time, it is through these spatialised bodies that the wound once presenced would find some iteration materialised in other parts of the same social order, be it as repeated transgression, enfolded secret, or shattered constitution.

Sometimes, the *scene of the crime* emerges even through re-spatialised settings that offer a different point of access. In *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014), the psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk describes his meeting with Albert Pesso at the founding conference of the United States Association for Body Psychotherapy. Pesso, a former dancer with the Martha Graham Dance Company, had been invited to conduct a workshop on PBSP (Pesso Boyden System Psychomotor) therapy, a method developed together with Diane Boyden-Pesso, his wife and a fellow dance practitioner. Their practice was concerned with interactive physical ways where one can connect with their somatic selves to create new memories. Van der Kolk attended Pesso's workshop on PBSP therapy where participants were encouraged to share of themselves within a group setting and observed that when somatic expressions of posture, gaze, and tone of voice of participants were affirmed with a 'witness statement,' people

seemed encouraged and comforted by their opportunity to address their surroundings with a newly inscribed agency (Van der Kolk 2014, 357). In these sessions, it was not so much that perpetrators had received their dues or that reparation was successfully sought, but in physically responding to the memories troubling their inner worlds, such sessions provided participants the opportunity for clarifying their emotions through the spatialisation of objects.

Interestingly, neuroimaging research has also shown that the same non-verbal right hemisphere of the brain is where spatial relations and the "imprint of trauma" are both sited (Van der Kolk 2014, 357). Van der Kolk was intrigued that when PBSP workshop participants were tasked to create three-dimensional structures through stand-in bodies or objects representing important characters in their lives through a method referred to as 'Structures,' arranging them as they desired or rectifying them as they found necessary, it had given the participants some form of relief and comfort. Van der Kolk explains:

> Projecting your inner world into the three-dimensional space of a structure enables you to see what's happening in the theatre of your mind and gives you a much clearer perspective on your reactions to people and events in the past. As you position placeholders for the important people in your life, you may be surprised by the unexpected memories, thoughts, and emotions that come up. You then can experiment with moving the pieces around on the external chessboard that you've created and see what effect it has on you. (Van der Kolk 2014, 359)

This observation recalls activist practices such as the forum theatre, developed under the umbrella term 'Theatre of the Oppressed' by Augusto Boal in the 1970s which allowed spectators to experiment with ways of countering social oppression. As a scripted work however, *Ibsen House* is rehearsed and not open for audience intervention, and therefore does not avail the same level of visible agency. Nonetheless, if the practices of psychotherapy may indeed initiate a re-ordering of the psyche through the re-ordering of body and space, then Van der Kolk's observations on the usefulness of "projecting your inner world into the three-dimensional space of a structure" (Van der Kolk 2014, 359) also suggests to us the potential of art and performance for transcending the impasse of trauma.

The Negotiations of Self

Observation 2: Affiliated identities of trauma morph as per the relations that surround them.

Presencing, as I expressed in the second chapter, provides a way of analysing traumatic wounds through relational dynamics beyond the visible. In discourses of contemporary trauma, being present constitutes not only the witnessing of the original event, but also the potential re-witnessing of its account—be it through the recollection of memory or the affirmation of testimony. To be present thus, is to bear witness while not necessarily to that of the original event. In the psychoanalyst Dori Laub's work with survivors of the Holocaust, Laub (1992) reflects on the criteria of bearing witness to events which are arguably considered to be without witness, ironically due to the difficulty of extricating oneself from its circumstances. Laub's take on witnessing has instead to do with testimony and memory, to which he articulates three categories of engagement: first, the witnessing of one's own recall; second, the witnessing of another's testimony; and third, the witnessing of the *event* of witnessing. This third category is a combinative one, referring to the presencing of testimony while being simultaneously aware of their own position as listener/observer.

Laub's inscribed framework formalises second-hand witnessing as process. In his research, Laub relates a story of a man who had escaped from labour camp as a child and carried a photograph of his mother that he prayed to as a symbolic promise of her return. It was not that the mother was voyeuristically present in any way, but in lacking an affirmative presence of a witness, a concept of the mother (through the photograph) was thus experienced to be so. Laub explains his reading of the situation:

> In my interpretation, what this young vagabond was doing with the photograph of his mother was, precisely, creating his first witness, and the creation of that witness was what enabled him to survive his years on the streets of Krakow. This story exemplifies the process whereby survival takes place through the creative act of establishing and maintaining an internal witness who substitutes for the lack of witnessing in real life. (Laub 1992, 87)

Related to as such, the embodiment of a witnessing presence resided in material artifacts,

bearing witness as if an actual person. While the mother did miraculously find the boy in his later years as an adult, the memory of the mother had no longer resembled the picture. The bond with which the boy (now adult) became accustomed to had become so distant from the mother's reappearance in his reality that it further devastated his sense of self. This is not the healing journey that one would expect.

There are two parts to this story which I find intriguing. The first relates to what Van der Kolk observed in PBSP sessions, where the relationality of spatialised bodies and objects had generated such powerful moments of presencing that stood in for what the envisioned persons could not, in the same way that the photograph in Laub's account had supplanted the presence of the actual mother to even more potent effect. The second relates to how survival is rather more to do with the negotiation of imagined relations in the ongoing present, where actual reparation of circumstances are never easily attainable and thus complicates the possibility and promise of healing. The empathic work we perform as audiences in the theatre often oscillates between the three categories of witnessing as introduced by Laub, as does the central motif of the house on the stage which keeps watch over all evolving events. Several occasions alluded to are never situationally depicted on the theatre stage, and have therefore never been witnessed by the audience. Sometimes, these incidents are set up to be inferred as witnessed by other characters in the play, such as repeated infractions in the domestic space of the house which are never been played out to audiences as such. While I would suggest that our witnessing as audience affirms not only the events and accounts transmitted within the worlds of *Ibsen House*, but also the knowledge of such happenings in the world at large, it also has the dual implication of failure to realise positive change. Furthermore, our empathic presence is also reflected in the spatial body of the onstage house, a folding of presences, one into the other. Crucially, both houses are keeping watching while also being entirely complicit insofar as what our circumstances would have us do. And yet, I would argue that

this too is a continual negotiation. Being present becomes less about time or subjects, but the enactive and evolving relationship between purveyors of memory within a given moment.

Our positions as witnessing audiences, as do the many characters in *Ibsen House*, sets us all within a dynamic framework that is not simply black and white. The positions of perpetrator and survivor in cases of child sex abuse may even sometimes be morally ambiguous (Bennett 2005, 27). Within the transgenerational timeline of *Ibsen House*, we are given knowledge that Cees, whose identity was predominantly contextualised as a perpetrator in the timeline of scenarios, was also a victim in his childhood. Both victim and victimiser, Cee's passing on without society's acknowledgement of his own traumas, which have been held to secrecy and thus effectively denied, describes in effect, the death of his own witnessing body. It is a tragedy on its own, overcome by the tragedies he then perpetuates. The position of victim can no longer be evaluated through degrees of innocence as the socially engaged will find themselves implicated to some degree. The position of victimiser is consequently also a complicated one. Do actions have to begin from one, or simply flow through one? The lines are porous and difficult to map, as presencing also encompasses the conduits through which memory and knowledge flow, necessarily implicating everyone.

As mentioned, many in the Kerkman family bear vestiges of such knowledge—as do ourselves as spectators—making most, if not all, complicit through their relational entanglements. Sociality is one strand in the ecology of how trauma travels. There is Johanna, the wife of Cees, who bears knowledge of potential transgressions and protects their children by locking their bedrooms in the night. There is Thomas, the brother of Cees, who realising in shock what Cees had done to Thomas' own daughter Caroline, had avowed to shut down their shared business but eventually stayed on for the family's livelihood and reputation. There is also the complicated positions of their children, all who bear either first or second-hand knowledge, but whose accounts are often dismissed by adults who take little to no

action. Even Lena burdened by the weight of experience, of knowledge, but also of denial, was revealed to have knowingly let her own child Fleur spend time with the accused, eventually leading to Fleur's suicide.

Traumatic accounts are never linear. Reparation thus, is never simply about turning back the clock and attempting to make right what was wrong. It would in fact often seem that what is suggested of the various hurts is that it is often far too late to make amends, as amends can often never be made past the act. That is not to say that nothing more can be done, but that the only action that could reasonably and potentially have an impact is to reconceive of these ties that bind. Berlant describes the development of trauma as an optimistic attachment attributed to a "cluster of promises" (Berlant 2011, 23). In this sense, I attend to the same in *Ibsen House* in how it is not so much the hope of discovery or reparation which has yet been fulfilled, but rather, it matters more as Berlant suggests, that we change how we manage these attachments—that is, our relationships to these promises.

The Networks of Sensation

Observation 3: Sensory phenomena of trauma are dynamically assembled and distributed.

Any attempt to represent the psychological wound—particularly in live performance—demands for a complex mirroring of its fluid and fragmented dynamics. It bears repeating that traumatic experience troubles representation. As a live performance, *Ibsen House* attempts a number of strategies for the enactment of trauma-related experiences. Some as mentioned in earlier chapters, include the use of narratorial gaps to suggest the fragmentary character of traumatic memory. But traumatic memory does not simply concern the brokenness of narrative. One of the reasons why the communication of traumatic experience can be so difficult is because it does not simply abide by event sequence but rather resides in active repositories of sensation that finds its way through networks of time and space. But sense memory is also not simply confined to bodies. As Bennett argues in her article "The

Aesthetics of Sense-Memory" (2003), sense memory must also be recognised as occurring in tandem with prevalent socio-cultural conditions:

> Radically different from timeless or transhistorical expressionism, [sense memory] aims to constitute a language of subjective process (specifically of affective and emotional process) to complement history and to work in a dialectical relationship with common memory. Its production thus becomes a contingent and culturally situated practice—linked to social histories—that requires framing against a backdrop of cultural knowledge. (Bennett 2003, 29)

What is important to note is that the affectivity of trauma, while individually felt, is never an isolated occurrence. Experienced as bodily affect, any attempt to convey of the same cannot solely depend on the referential possibilities of particular imagery or action, but by strategies of staging through which varying durations might allow for similar intensities of emotions to take shape. This has been explored in the third chapter. Affective intensities are always emergent within a context of evolving circumstance, an ecology of situations.

As I infer from Bennett, any public discourse to be had about trauma and memory would necessarily require a means of engagement that may accommodate the subjectivities of such experience, a means of engagement such as through the visual arts and performance where experiences of bodily affect may likewise be generated. Experiences of trauma are also entwined with its many pasts and futures. On this account, the sense memory that extends from trauma also has to be understood through its temporal character as theorised by Freud through *Nachträglichkeit,* or "deferred action" (Leys 2000, 20). This characterisation of trauma's delayed temporality in essence suggests that the event of trauma constitutes not just a physical violation or shocking encounter but is rather more distributed as recurring phenomena as a result of that first or repeated event. The literary theorist Cathy Caruth follows from Freud in proposing that the dilemma of attempting to relate to the memory of trauma as witnessed is such that history becomes "no longer straightforwardly referential" (Caruth 1996, 11). In this lies one of many dialectics of a "double telling" according to Caruth—"the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life:* between

the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 1996, 7). It is not just bodily affects that resist direct expression, but also the temporal aspect of trauma reflected and reciprocated in *Ibsen House*'s extensive timeline.

What results from the traumatic encounter is the fracturing of the practiced ways that guide how we live. In *Ibsen House*, while Cees and Sebastiaan pass on due to old age or other illness, those like Fleur, the youngest of the lot, would die from suicide, followed by the self-immolation of her parents as they together perish with the burning of the Kerkman house. The only way that some of these characters would ever transcend their past seems to be through death—tragic but also somehow necessary given the way things play out. At its end, it is only Caroline who endures and who devotes herself completely to the rebuilding of the house in its concluding scene. With this new home for women and children or migrants in need, the second house enacts new promise into being. For a brief moment in *Ibsen House*, traumatic wounds might have seemed to become past. While such an ending may seem in some ways to provide an easy fix to a lifetime of trauma, I would argue that the unfolding of events in fact suggests the contrary. Caroline's attempt to re-structure the past through a rebuilt house hardly indicates the resolution of crisis. Can past traumas ever be resolved? Might the past—her past, their pasts—ever be reclaimed? We know what follows. Caroline finds herself haunted by memories past as different worlds converge. Sense memory moves uneasily, but always circles back in its web of relations across time and space. Eventually, Caroline burns down the second house she has worked so hard to rebuild and revive.

Conclusion: Between Worlds

To sense of trauma and to facilitate its enactment makes for very different intensities of expression. When trauma is subsumed within an enacted narrative of past and present incidents, the intensities of trauma might be diminished in a manner that departs from trauma as experienced. This could perhaps also be a reason why transgressive acts in *Ibsen House* are

never outrightly enacted, or come close to any attempt at representation, as any effort at expressly embodying such action will fall short of the immensity of emotions which accompanies such event in the present. It is no wonder that events in *Ibsen House* are often performed via a fragmentary timeline, a jumping between sequences. This perhaps, best captures the character of trauma and memory through the fluctuating rhythms of shockwaves registered by the psyche.

In working through the vicissitudes of the Kerkman family as well as in our own presencing of the wound as spectators, I have attempted to provide an ecological perspective of *Ibsen House* through discernible connections in the production, giving breath to how trauma travels through entities and relations both human and nonhuman. To surmise, I have elaborated on three main observations:

1. *Spaces of trauma are always collective ones in a process of becoming*;
2. *Affiliated identities of trauma morph as per the relations that surround them*;
3. *Sensory phenomena of trauma are dynamically assembled and distributed*.

Two overlapping frames of reference have guided my reflections: the world of *Ibsen House* and the world where *Ibsen House* is performed. What I offer in my account as spectator and as witness—to use the framework of recounting as per the discourse on trauma—will always have a sense of falling short in some ways, as I am attempting through language and particularly through reasoning, to channel an account of the intensities through which incidents of *Ibsen House* are manifested in performance. When such stories of trauma are assembled in the space of the theatre, they operate across worlds and as such, necessitate the use of different (and new) "languages" as Bennett describes of affectivity in the arts as contributing to contemporary discourses on trauma (Bennett 2005, 24). I suggest that where a witness account of the play lacks in the full force and immediacy of emotions, the sense of

crisis does not so much disappear but becomes something mired in process.

To convey of events that have transpired, trauma always finds itself differently registered as it moves through bodies and spaces. We find ourselves return somehow, though differently, to the space of the page as did the beginnings of trauma studies research, to think through the signification and representation of trauma in culture and what the *languages* we engage with avail in the articulation of traumatic experience. As we attend to and process these experiences in the space of the theatre and within the context of our own subjective realities, our minds are always arbitrating these felt connections. Informed and impacted by our own sense memories, our perception constitutes a filtering that necessarily enframes the traumatic experience. Indeed, our capability to manage these affects that impinge upon us, as do the characters in *Ibsen House*, is only made possible through the contemplation of similar situations that allow for an affective present to be likewise generated.

What art and performance contributes to research on trauma can be traced from Laub's description of the third category of witnessing where we find ourselves positioned in a situation where we are able to observe ourselves in the process of witnessing. It is the presencing of testimony, which happens not just individually, but a singular evolving experience within the simultaneous presencing of a collective body. Certainly, we would assume that there is a moral imperative to not be the transgressor, but overcoming the complicity of preserved knowledge seems rather to be the uphill battle that most would face when presencing the wound, as do we as spectators in observation. A presencing ecology helps us make sense of how trauma is always entangled within concurrent webs of relations. As memories go, the presencing of the wound in any given moment also necessarily revives components of the past, but such affections are also always encountered anew as our sense of self veers between transient states in a before and after. We are always already implicated in one world or another.

Afterword

I had begun by asking a question regarding *Ibsen House*: what might we say is the wider ecology that exists? One issue I have not elaborated on much within the context of a performance analysis, is the abuse and exploitation of minors within groups premised on an environment of safety and trust. This might refer to a family situation as per the case of *Ibsen House*, or indeed any intimate community such as educational or religious institutions. It may also refer to domestic or emotional abuse, harassment, or indeed, any traumatic suffering experienced within a privacy of a shelter or a seeming legitimacy of relations. Indeed, such incidents often go unreported, are dismissed as hearsay, or when it does follow with publicity of some sort, it may seem like something distant, failures of another, trouble that someone else should resolve. What I have proposed in the processual methodology of *presencing* does not promise to heal any wounds, so to speak, but what it can do is to gradually awaken the affective capacity of our minds to sense of our singular selves and empathically of each other within a collective, as one might also approach the experience of a live performance work in the theatre.

Our relations with one another constitute the relations of a larger ecological system. This emphasis on interconnectedness has been the impetus for this body of research. My method has been to turn to the work of affect, particularly of an affective consciousness, which can provide a form of rallying mechanism for action, for better or worse or even for leisure, but it also matters how we take to these innate bodily affects when processed into intuitive practice or strategic action in moments of crisis. It is no wonder that political rallies, sporting crowds, public demonstrations, are but some examples where collectives find affective and ideological alignment. Any live situation can also take on such function, if its potential be duly recognised as such.

As I have argued, if there be a *turn to presencing* as rendered by the *turn to*

performance, we need to then identify where representational forms, visible orders, and dominant conventions present themselves and begin to cultivate our consciousness towards other infrastructures of experience across the conceptual, environmental, ideological, and instinctual. I have engaged with *Ibsen House* to illustrate how the presencing of wounds can be understood in practice, using frameworks of material, time, and cognition to describe the processual details of my approach, but there can certainly be many other entry points that apply to other varieties of content and engagement. The same caveat applies to the shapes of affect as observed of the 'conversation,' 'deviation,' and the 'episode' as these are wholly determined by the temporal forms within any particular project. These are all contingent, as should be clear in my adaptation of Berlant's methodology.

Indeed, a lot of my research has only been possible because of the guiding principles developed by Lauren Berlant in *Cruel Optimism* which show us how trauma is so often lived as impasse, attuning our senses to the affective structure of our many attachments. Berlant's simple claim, that the present is first experienced affectively, has allowed me to more deeply contemplate questions of living especially within a collective existence. Importantly as well, it is to be aware of how feelings may guide and how we might productively carry forth this knowledge. It is with a heavy heart that I learnt of Berlant's passing in 2021. To Berlant, whose work I am certain will continue to inspire many in time to come, I convey my deepest gratitude and admiration.

Appendix A

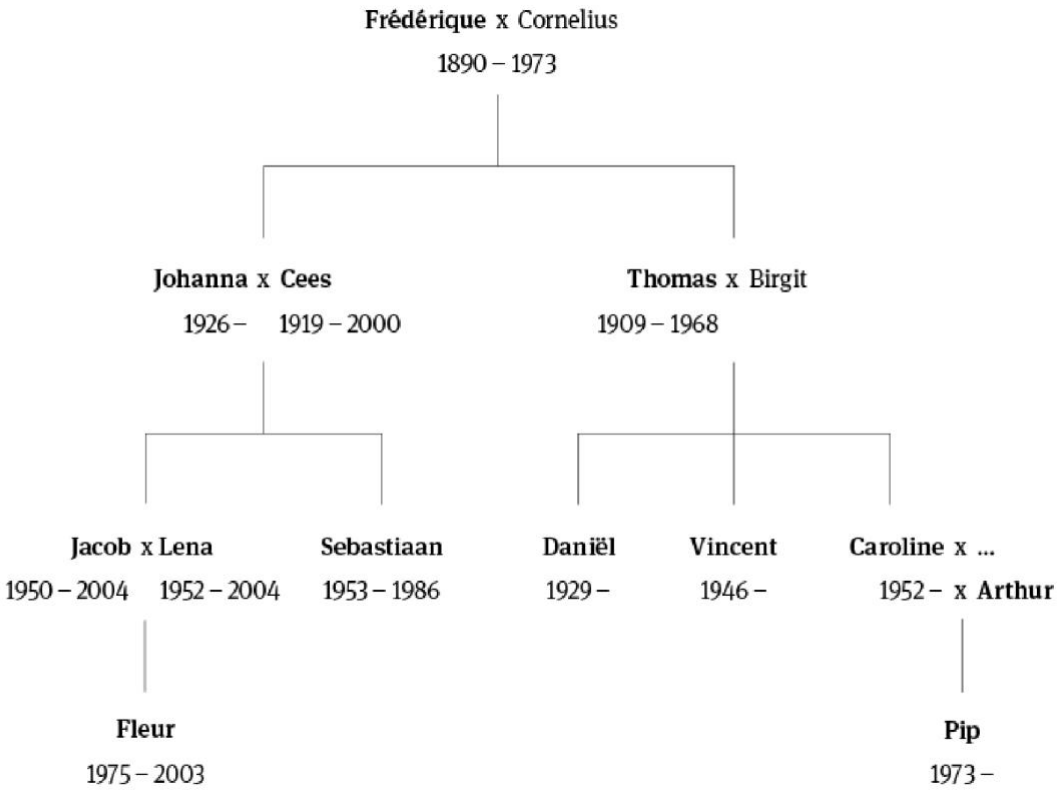


Diagram of the Kerkman family tree as illustrated in the programme of *Ibsen House* (ITA 2021b).

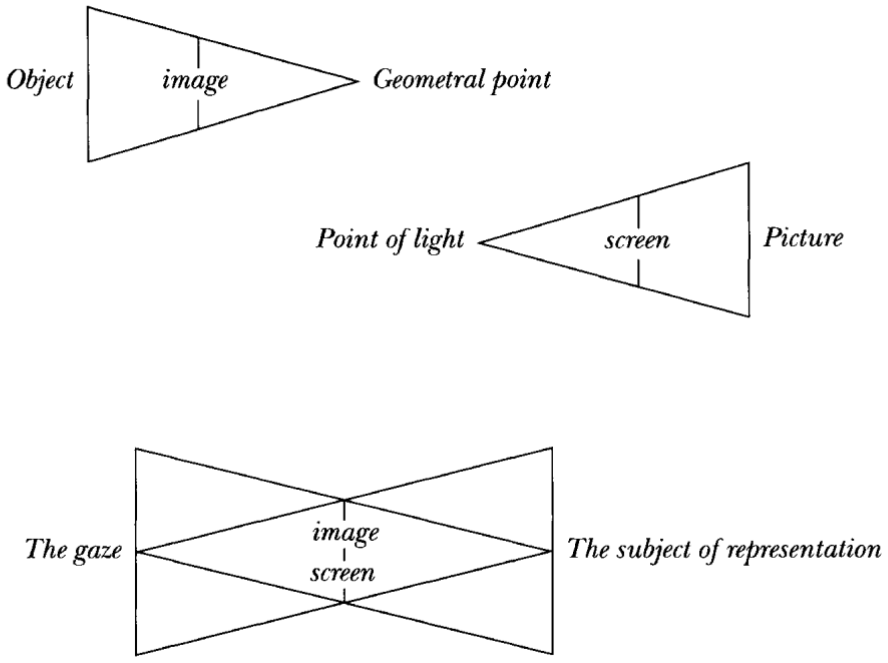
Appendix B

Photograph of a scene from the first half of *Ibsen House*.

Appendix C

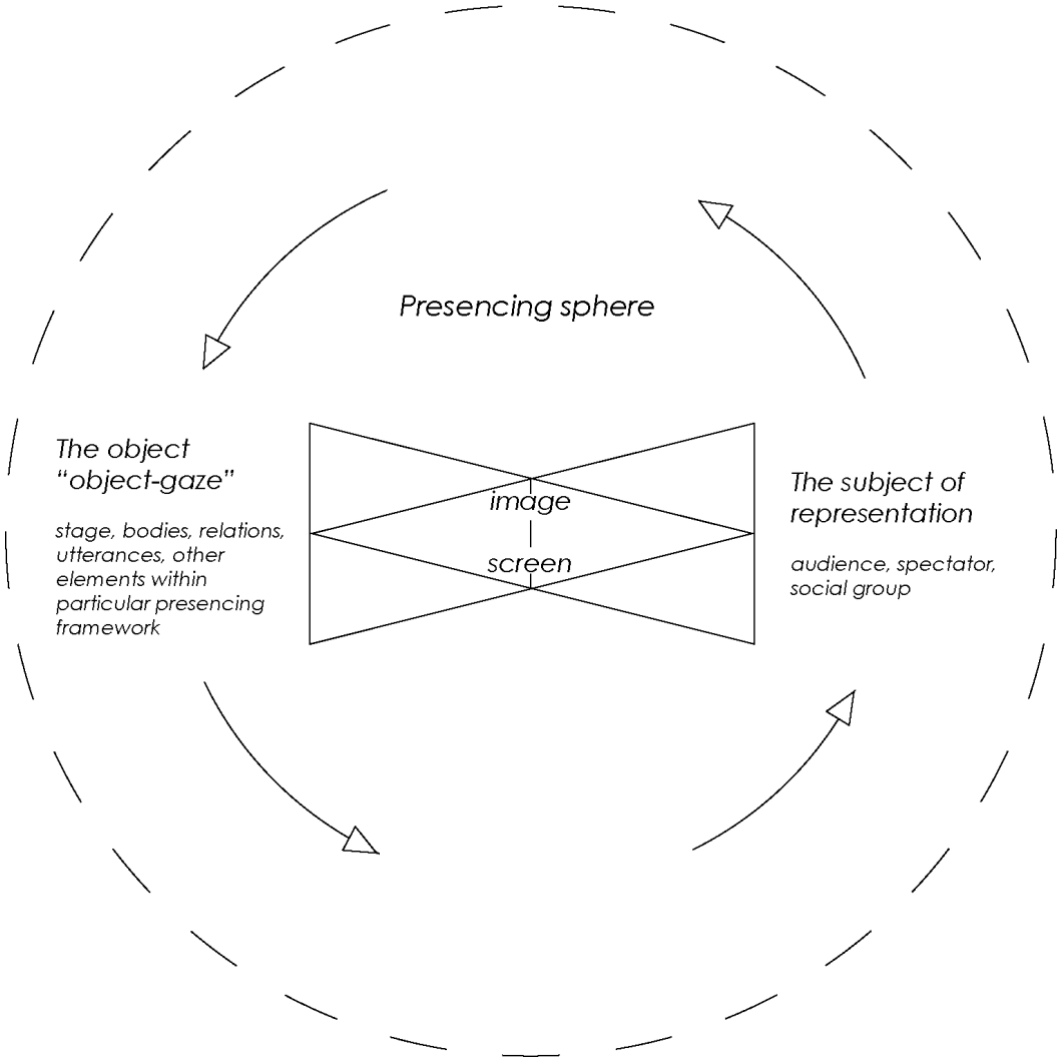
Photograph of a scene from the second half of *Ibsen House*.

Appendix D



Hal Foster's rendition of Jacques Lacan's theory of the gaze as published in "Obscene, Abject, Traumatic" (1996, 108).

Appendix E



Presencing in relation to subject-object positions within a porous sphere of consciousness.

It is adapted from Foster's work on Lacan's perspective of visuality (see Appendix D).

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